

**CONSTITUTIONAL ENGINEERING IN DIVIDED SOCIETIES:  
PAPUA NEW GUINEA IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE**

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## **Candidate's Statement**

This thesis represents my own work except where otherwise acknowledged.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ben Reilly', with a stylized, cursive script.

**Ben Reilly**  
**12 June 1998**



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This thesis has had a long gestation but a relatively short birth. I first began research as a PhD student at the Australian National University (ANU) in January 1992, but almost immediately had to postpone my studies due to employment commitments – first at the Australian Electoral Commission, then at the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. It was not until April 1995 that I was able to return to try and finish what I had started, but even then work commitments and changing circumstances forced me to suspend my enrolment for a year. I am therefore very grateful to both the staff of the Department of Political and Social Change at ANU for their patience and flexibility over this period, and to my superiors at the Prime Minister's Department for giving me the study leave to finish this thesis.

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## **Acronyms**

<b>ALP</b>	<b>Australian Labor Party</b>
<b>AV</b>	<b>Alternative Vote</b>
<b>BV</b>	<b>Block Vote</b>
<b>CPC</b>	<b>Constitutional Planning Committee (PNG)</b>
<b>CRC</b>	<b>Constitution Review Commission (Fiji)</b>
<b>CV</b>	<b>Contingent Vote</b>
<b>DLP</b>	<b>Democratic Labor Party</b>
<b>EDF</b>	<b>Electoral Development Fund</b>
<b>FPTP</b>	<b>First Past the Post</b>
<b>List PR</b>	<b>List Proportional Representation</b>
<b>MMP</b>	<b>Mixed Member Proportional</b>
<b>MP</b>	<b>Member of Parliament</b>
<b>PNG</b>	<b>Papua New Guinea</b>
<b>PR</b>	<b>Proportional Representation</b>
<b>SMD</b>	<b>Single Member District</b>
<b>STV</b>	<b>Single Transferable Vote</b>
<b>TRS</b>	<b>Two-Round System</b>
<b>UPNG</b>	<b>University of Papua New Guinea</b>

## Abstract

Representative democracy is inherently difficult in multi-ethnic societies, where ethnicity is a politically-salient cleavage around which interests are organised for political purposes. These divided societies are prone to develop 'centrifugal' politics which reward extremist ethnic appeals, zero-sum political behaviour and ethnic conflict, and which consequently often lead to the breakdown of democracy. Careful design of political institutions is therefore required if the routines of accommodation and negotiation necessary to ensure peaceful democratic politics are to become consolidated.

Many political scientists see the choice of electoral system as one of the most important institutional decisions for such societies. Some scholars argue that electoral systems which encourage politicians to appeal for the second-choice votes of rival communities are necessary to engineer moderate, accommodative politics at the constituency level. The best electoral systems to encourage such behaviour, according to these arguments, are 'preferential' systems such as the alternative vote, which encourage rival groups to cooperate and negotiate for secondary support. Prescriptions based on 'preference-swapping' form the centrepiece of a wider model of constitutional design for divided societies typified as 'centripetalism'. Centripetalism stands in contrast to the dominant model of democracy in divided societies, consociationalism, which emphasises the need for divided societies to institute proportional representation elections and mechanisms for elite power-sharing if democracy is to survive the travails of deep ethnic divisions.

A major criticism of centripetal theories to date has been the lack of empirical examples of centripetalism in action. This thesis attempts to provide this missing evidence and to evaluate the empirical record of centripetalism in divided societies, primarily by reference to elections in the highly ethnically-fragmented state of Papua New Guinea (PNG). Detailed analysis of elections in PNG, which used the alternative vote in the 1960s and 1970s, lends support to the theory that centripetal institutions will, under certain circumstances, encourage accommodative political behaviour on the part of both candidates and their supporters. Further analysis of moves away from accommodative politics following PNG's change of electoral rules in 1975 is also presented. The evidence from PNG supports the argument that political actors will modify their behaviour according to the constitutional 'rules of the game', and that deliberate 'engineering' of those rules can thus have a substantive impact upon political outcomes.

Comparative evidence from other states that have adopted centripetal electoral institutions -- such as Australia, Sri Lanka and Fiji -- is also examined, and lends further support to the theory that the use of centripetal electoral systems can encourage moderate and accommodatory political behaviour under certain circumstances. This comparative evidence raises the possibility of developing a general model of centripetal approaches to democracy in divided societies. The thesis concludes that the application of the centripetal model is highly dependent upon demographic and socio-structural conditions, particularly the size, number and geographic dispersion of contending ethnic groups. It is likely to work well either in situations of extreme ethnic fragmentation (such as in Papua New Guinea) or in situations where competing groups are widely dispersed and inter-mixed with each other (such as in Fiji). While uncommon in some regions, this type of ethnic group distribution is found to be relatively widespread in the Asia-Pacific region, due in part to the influences of colonialism and the presence of large Chinese and Indian diasporas. Comparative analysis suggests that centripetal institutions may offer the most appropriate choices for engineering accommodative politics in many of the ethnically-divided states of the Asia-Pacific region.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

The question of whether, and how, democracy can survive in divided societies has long been a source of considerable controversy in political science. Some of the greatest political thinkers have argued that stable democracy is only possible in relatively homogenous societies. John Stuart Mill, for example, argued that democracy was incompatible with the structure of a multi-ethnic society, as “free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities” (1958, 230). This was a prevalent view amongst many scholars and policy makers until at least the 1960s, with the perils of ‘tribalism’ and ethnic division frequently cited as the root causes for the failure of democracy in the newly independent states of Africa and Asia in the post-war period.<sup>1</sup> Much of this conventional wisdom regarded ethnic conflicts as primordial and irrational manifestations of traditional rivalries and passions, leaving little room for explanations based on the objectives and interests of those involved in the conflict. When scholars did turn their attention towards such interests, many saw more reasons for the failure of democracy in such societies than for its persistence. A classic example is the rational-actor arguments against the likelihood of stable democracy in divided societies put by Rabushka and Shepsle (1972), who argue that political entrepreneurs typically find the rewards of ‘outbidding’ on ethnic issues greater than those of moderation.

Following Rabushka and Shepsle, I define a society as being ‘divided’ if it is both ethnically diverse *and* if ethnicity is a *politically salient* cleavage around which interests are organised for political purposes, such as elections (Rabushka and Shepsle 1972, 21). Democracy is inherently difficult in such cases because of the strong tendency towards politicization of ethnic demands, which in turn often lead to zero-sum, winner-take-all politics in which some groups are permanently included and some permanently excluded. Because ethnic identities tend to be highly salient in divided societies, potential leaders have a strong incentive to attempt to harness these identities as a political force, and to use communal demands as the base instigator of constituency mobilization. This mobilization often leads to divisiveness and conflict because such demands generally come at the expense of other groups, thus instigating countervailing

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Low 1991, 272-73.

claims and counter-claims. Because demands based on 'outbidding' are often easier to instigate and maintain than those based on accommodation, politics in divided societies can quickly become characterised by *centrifugal* forces, in which the moderate political centre is overwhelmed by extremist forces. The failure of democratic politics is often the result.<sup>2</sup>

Since the early 1970s, however, a revised focus on the possibilities and prospects for democracy in divided societies has been evident. At the base of this new wave of interest in democracy was a recognition that democratic government, rather than oligarchy or authoritarianism, presented by far the best prospects for managing deep societal divisions, and that democracy itself operates, as Prezworski (1991, 10-14) has argued, as a system for managing and processing conflict, rather than resolving it. Democracy increasingly came to be seen as not just possible, but necessary, for the peaceful management of divided societies. This more optimistic assessment of the potential of democracy has been greatly boosted by what Huntington (1991) characterised as the 'third wave' of democratisation. Beginning in the 1970s and gaining pace in the early 1990s, the 'third wave' has seen a threefold increase in the number of democratic governments around the world.

The country at the centre of this study, Papua New Guinea, attained self-government in 1973 and independence in 1975, and thus represents one of the founding members of this third wave (Huntington 1991, 24). On many indicators, Papua New Guinea is one of the most successful democracies in the developing world, with a record of unbroken competitive democracy which exceeds that of almost all comparable 'Third World' countries, and a number of 'Western' countries (e.g. Spain, Portugal, Greece) as well. It is also an ethnically-divided state, home to several thousand clan-based ethnic groups. As we shall see, Papua New Guinea represents one of the few cases of an ethnically-divided society in which 'centripetal' political institutions have been used, thus providing vital empirical evidence for wider questions of democracy in divided societies. In particular, examination of Papua New Guinea's democratic record enables us to shed new light on two of the most basic questions of political science: is democracy possible in divided societies? And, if so, which institutional arrangements are most likely to secure stable and legitimate democratic government?

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<sup>2</sup> See Sisk 1995, 23.

Scholars concerned with these questions have increasingly found that examination of political institutions is central to understanding the procedural aspects of democracy, where “multiple political forces compete inside an institutional framework” (Prezewski 1991, 11). The rise of rational choice theory and the ‘new institutionalism’ have both refocussed attention on the organisation of political life, and the need to analyse the incentives for action presented by political institutions, when attempting to understand the behaviour of political actors. There is also a strongly normative aspect to this process. A better understanding of the effect of political institutions presents the possibility of being able to *design* institutions so that desired outcomes — for example, cooperation and compromise — are promoted and thereby encouraged to further develop. Three broad categories of political institutions have received particular attention in this regard: the territorial structure of the state (particularly the question of unitary versus federal approaches); the form of the state’s legislative and executive functions (particularly the question of parliamentary versus presidential forms of government); and the nature of political representation (which focuses predominantly on the effects of different electoral systems). It is this final area of representation, concerning the design of electoral systems, that is of central concern to this thesis.

### **The new institutionalism**

The past decade has seen a burgeoning academic interest in political *institutions*, examining how they function, why they develop, and the reasons behind their success or failure. In the 1980s, as the limits of behavioural approaches to political science became increasingly apparent, institutions such as parliaments, executives and electoral systems increasingly became the focus of study in their own right. The expanded interest in institutions such as electoral systems was fired in part by the belated recognition that changes to institutions could, under certain circumstances, effect significant change on the wider political system. Arend Lijphart, one of the leading comparative politics scholars, has characterised the rebirth of interest in politics’ institutional aspects as being

based on the conviction that institutions do matter, that they are not merely weak and inconsequential superstructures dependent on a ‘truly’ determinant socioeconomic, cultural, or other non-institutional base. For political engineers, and democratic political engineers in particular, this new approach means that different institutional forms, rules, and practices can have major consequences both for the degree of democracy in a democratic system and for the operation of the system (1991e, ix).

In 1984, March and Olsen heralded the appearance of a 'new institutionalism' in political science. Political institutions, they argued, were gaining a more autonomous role as subjects of academic study: "democracy depends not only on economic and social conditions but also on the design of political institutions ... They are political actors in their own right" (1984, 738). The natural corollary of viewing institutions as 'actors' rather than inert structures is that they take on new roles within a political system: they both influence and are influenced by other actors (this is particularly apposite to the theoretical debate on electoral systems, which will be dealt with below). These relationships with other elements are seldom straightforward, often working within a complex, multi-directional arena: institutions which affect the distribution of resources, for example, also affect the power of political actors, which in turn affects political institutions. Constitutions and other formal legal instruments constrain some potential actions while encouraging others. Particularly in traditional societies, some forms of behaviour may be constrained by the modern legal apparatus but not by traditional cultural and social mores, and vice versa. To the political engineer, then, institutions change outcomes, and changing formal political institutions can result in changes in political behaviour and political practice. This message has been echoed by a number of recent studies, reflecting an emerging scholarly orthodoxy concerning the importance of political institutions and institutional design.<sup>3</sup>

### *The collective action problem*

A more specific reason for focussing on the design of political institutions is their role as conduits for collective political activity. In this role, they are key agents in mediating between the political activities of social organisations (such as political parties or ethnic groups) and the activities of elites (such as elected politicians or tribal leaders). But there is a logical paradox to the interplay between the two that political theorists have dubbed the 'collective action problem'. Simply stated, the problem of collective action holds that, while it is logical to assume that rational individuals will act according to their own self-interest and personal welfare, it does not follow that *groups* of individuals will act in this way. In fact, the assumption that groups of individuals will act together to achieve their interests has been shown to be logically inconsistent with the

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Taagepera and Shugart 1989; Shugart and Carey 1992; Lijphart 1994; Sartori 1994.

assumption that individuals will rationally act to further their own interests. Mancur Olson, who uncovered the collective action problem, writes that

unless the number of individuals in a group is quite small, or unless there is coercion or some other special device to make individuals act in their common interest, *rational, self-interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interests* (1971, 2, emphasis in original).

Although Olson's theories have had a considerable impact in many areas of social research, they have had a particular influence on discussions of public policy, theories of common goods, and more generally upon questions of political institutions. Together, theories of collective action and the new institutionalism have become increasingly identified with the tools derived from rational choice theory, particularly those dealing with decision-making rules and outcomes.<sup>4</sup> According to one recent overview, rational choice analysis has introduced a synthesising element to discussions of political institutions:

Pre-behavioural political science focused strongly on analyzing the establishment and operation of institutions, such as legislatures, constitutions and bureaucracies ... The problem, however, was that the traditional approach had no way of telling, except by intuition, which institutions were really important, or what their effects were on political behaviour. Rational choice theory's great contribution has been to furnish us with such an idea: namely, that the important institutions are the ones which are capable of solving the problem of collective action, which is to say, the ones that *make co-operation seem possible and rational for the agents involved* (Rothstein 1996, 159, emphasis added).

A fundamental argument of this thesis is that certain electoral systems, in certain circumstances, will provide precisely these incentives towards co-operation if political actors act in a rational manner, while others will logically lead to hostile, non-accommodative behaviour if individuals act rationally. The presumptions of rational choice theory thus inform this thesis, even if the methodology used has little relation to the often highly abstract modelling that typifies many rational choice analyses. A related issue concerns the way political institutions themselves serve to structure the way political choices are understood and expressed: some voting systems enable much more sophisticated gradations of preferences to be expressed than others, for instance (Grofman 1989, 1). The theoretical debate concerning the logical consequences of the way different voting systems aggregate preferences will be examined in Chapter Seven.

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<sup>4</sup> See Shepsle 1989, 131-37.

### *A procedural definition of democracy*

In keeping with this revised focus on institutions, modern discussions of democracy and democratisation increasingly emphasise normative concerns and the role of appropriate procedural rules. The most influential definition of democracy along these utilitarian lines was first formulated by Joseph Schumpeter in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1947), who defined the democratic method as “that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote” (1947, 269).

The advantage of such a definition, which has become a touchstone for many contemporary discussions of democracy, is that it enables meaningful empirical analyses and comparisons. This “modest meaning of democracy” (Huntington 1989) as a set of institutional procedures, rather than abstract conceptualisations, greatly assisted the trend towards examination and comparison of demonstrated tendencies of democracy across different regions and cultures. By the 1970s, Huntington argues, the Schumpeterian definition was widely accepted:

theorists increasingly drew distinctions between rationalistic, utopian, idealistic definitions of democracy, on the one hand, and empirical, descriptive, institutional, and procedural definitions on the other, and concluded that only the latter type of definition provided the analytical precision and empirical referents that make the concept a useful one (1989, 6-7).

Successive generations of political scientists have attempted to refine or restate Schumpeter’s basic definition. Thus Riker (1964, 25), for example, argues that “the essential democratic institution is the ballot box and all that goes with it”; while Huntington himself defines a twentieth-century political system as democratic “to the extent that its most powerful collective decision-makers are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is able to vote” (1991, 29).

Similarly, Diamond, Linz and Lipset, in their study of democracy in developing countries, define democracy as a system of government that meets three essential conditions: meaningful *competition* for political power amongst individuals and organised groups; inclusive *participation* in the selection of leaders and policies, at least through free and fair elections; and a level of *civil and political liberties* sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation (1995, xvi). This is itself a refinement of Dahl’s much-cited definition of democracy (which he called ‘polyarchy’)

as a process of participation and contestation which approximates rather than fully satisfies democratic ideals, and will be the working definition of democracy used throughout this thesis (Dahl 1971, 1-7).

As Rothchild has shown, the importance of democratic procedures in situations of deep-rooted conflict is that they enable regimes to build a sense of a common fate amongst all significant groups, so that norms of reciprocity and bargaining can be developed and collective conflict can be focussed on negotiable issues:

As learning occurs and the routines of political bargaining become accepted, informal practices of cooperation become evident in executive, legislative, and party affairs ... By means of a sequential process, bargaining can induce a series of responses that can lead over time to established organized principles of action. Acceptance of such basic principles can lay a foundation that allows for an operating consensus without the necessity of regular negotiations on each issue ... Majoritarian democracy, then, is distinguishable from its partially authoritarian counterparts in the determined way it structures incentives for cooperative behaviour (1997, 45).

The result is that as democratic practices become increasingly regularised, and democratic procedures become deeply internalised by political actors, so democratic practices progress towards becoming part of a self-enforcing system which helps to create the conditions for its own persistence (Prezowski 1991, 26).

### *The third wave of democratisation*

The renewed interest in democracy and political institutions was not just triggered by changes in academic thinking but also, and much more importantly, by the striking movement towards democratic government in a range of previously authoritarian states over the past decade, and the re-emergence of constitutional and other structural issues as matters of significant debate in many established democracies. Between 1974 and 1991, roughly one-third of the world's 170-odd independent nation states transformed their political institutions into participatory democracies in a process Huntington (1991) characterised as the 'third wave' of democratisation.<sup>5</sup> This process has naturally encouraged a considerable literature dealing with democratic transitions and their consequences, and the relationship between institutional choices and the consolidation of democracy.<sup>6</sup> A number of scholars have argued that the greatest challenge facing

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<sup>5</sup> But while PNG's independence was contemporaneous with the 'third wave' democracies, it came as a result of colonial withdrawal and institutional transfer rather than the overthrow of authoritarianism which characterised most of the third wave in other regions.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Huntington 1991; Diamond and Plattner 1996; Diamond, Linz and Lipset 1988, 1989 and 1995; O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986.

new democracies relates to their representative institutions — many “don’t have the institutions to articulate the real interests of the people” (Pye 1990). Diamond, for example, suggests that “the single most important and urgent factor in the consolidation of democracy is not civil society but political institutionalization” (1996, 238). To survive, he says, new democracies need above all “robust political institutions” such as secure executives and effective legislatures composed of coherent, broadly-based parties encouraged by aggregative electoral institutions.

The 1970s and 1980s also saw a re-emergence amongst established democracies of constitutional and other institutional reforms as first-order concerns. Since 1970 six established European democracies have adopted new constitutions; more recently Italy, Japan and New Zealand have adopted radically new electoral systems which effectively amount to a new constitutional basis for politics in these countries. All of these developments have encouraged the move from viewing institutions as inert epiphenomena, expressions of an underlying political culture which itself ought to be the prime object of analysis, to being central to an appreciation of the modern state.<sup>7</sup>

Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1995) have argued that political institutionalization is strongly related to the persistence and stability of democracy, for several reasons. First, they argue, because institutions structure behaviour into stable, predictable and recurring patterns, institutionalised democracies are less volatile and more enduring than others. The nature of the electoral process, for example, is characterised by a recurring uncertainty of outcomes, thus encouraging a ‘rule bounded’ commitment amongst political actors to the process itself. Second, regardless of how they perform economically, democracies that have coherent and effective political institutions will be more likely to maintain order, ensure civil liberties and provide meaningful representation, competition, choice and accountability. Third, over the long run, well-institutionalised democracies are also more likely to produce workable, sustainable and effective social and economic policies. Finally, largely because of these first three factors, coherent democratic institutions are better able to limit military involvement in politics and assert civilian control (1995, 33). Institutional choices are thus of great importance for the longer-term prospects of democratic consolidation and sustainability.

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<sup>7</sup> See Bogdanor 1988.



## **Constitutional engineering**

The explicit possibilities of ‘engineering’ the development of a political system by the design of political institutions was given prominence in Sartori’s “Political Development and Political Engineering” (1968), which encouraged political scientists to take up the challenge of becoming participants in the building of political institutions (as, he argued, economists had long been involved with the economy), rather than being passive observers. Sartori was particularly interested in the possibilities of deliberate ‘constitutional engineering’. ‘Constitutional engineering’ refers to attempts to induce particular political outcomes by the design of political institutions. Some institutions of government can be purposively designed so as to reward particular types of behaviour and thus achieve particular outcomes. Electoral systems, for example, can be structured so as to enable minority groups or opinions to be represented in parliament, or they can ensure domination by one or two large parties. This dichotomy between inclusion and exclusion has many wider ramifications, particularly on the degree to which political behaviour is focussed at the centre or instead is increasingly drawn towards extreme positions. Political development in new democracies, Sartori argued, can be aided by the adoption of institutions which constrain the centrifugal tendencies which affect many newly-created nations. Electoral systems are particularly important to this process because they are, according to Sartori, “the most specific manipulable instrument of politics” (1968, 273). This oft-quoted formulation is now widely accepted: Lijphart, for example, reflects the scholarly consensus when he writes “if one wants to change the nature of a particular democracy, the electoral system is likely to be the most suitable and effective instrument for doing so” (1995a, 412).

Electoral systems have long been recognised as one of the most important institutional mechanisms for shaping the nature of political competition, firstly because of the inherent manipulability identified by Sartori — that is, they can be purposively designed with a view to achieving particular outcomes — and secondly, because they structure the arena of political competition, offering incentives for political actors to behave in certain ways, and rewarding those who respond to these incentives with electoral success. In other words, electoral system design has the potential to influence political outcomes by rewarding particular types of behaviour and placing constraints on others. In terms of divided societies, where ethnicity represents a fundamental political

cleavage, particular electoral systems can be designed to reward candidates and parties who act in a co-operative, accommodatory manner to rival groups; or they can punish these candidates and instead reward those who appeal only to their own ethnic group.

There are many ways of studying elections and electoral systems. At the most basic level, electoral systems can be viewed as either dependent or independent variables. In other words, we can look at the way electoral systems are shaped by their political environment — for example, the causes behind the introduction of particular electoral systems, such as those expounded by Stein Rokkan (1970) in his influential analysis of the adoption of proportional representation in continental Europe; or we can look at the consequences of electoral systems for other parts of a political system — for example, Rae's (1971) seminal investigation of the effects of electoral laws on political parties. If we look at electoral systems as being *dependent* variables, then we can begin by asking the question 'Why was this electoral system, and not some other, adopted?'. This question has become considerably more important since the events of 1989, as vast numbers of new democracies have rushed to adopt new electoral laws, and a number of established democracies have refashioned their old ones.

In a critical review of research on electoral systems, however, Lijphart (1985a, 7-8) has suggested that the more important task of electoral systems research is to examine electoral systems as *independent* variables, and thus to illuminate the consequences of these choices. Lijphart identifies the central preoccupations of the electoral systems literature concerning the consequences of election laws as being the degree of multipartism, the relationship between seats and votes, and the extent of 'manufacturing' of majorities for one or another (1985b, 8). All these preoccupations are clearly dependent upon the presence of functioning political parties. In fact, the question of the relationship between votes and seats has become something of a *sine qua non* of the entire electoral studies field. One influential work went so far as to claim that the seats-votes relationship "may be the Rosetta Stone" for unlocking a true science of politics "in the sense of a cumulation and interlinkage of quantitatively testable theory" (Taagepera and Shugart 1989, 246). Given this focus, it is perhaps not surprising that discussions of how to examine the effects of electoral systems in ways which do not focus on questions of proportionality and the seats-votes relationship are rare in the electoral studies literature. This presents particular difficulties when

discussing electoral systems in countries where political parties are weak or non-existent. When these underlying presumptions are excluded, much of the literature on elections and electoral systems has limited usefulness for a study of this type. Conversely, other ways in which ‘engineering’ of electoral rules can inter-relate with other elements of a political system — for example, the way the incentives presented by particular electoral rules can encourage or discourage certain types of behaviour on the part of politicians and candidates — are not well covered in the general literature, but are central to the concerns of this study.

### *Choosing an electoral system*<sup>8</sup>

The choice of electoral system is one of the most important institutional decisions for any democracy. Yet most states do not utilise electoral systems that have been consciously and deliberately chosen. Often, the choice of electoral system is essentially accidental: the result of an unusual combination of circumstances, of a passing trend, or of a quirk of history. The impacts of colonialism and the effects of influential neighbours are often especially strong. Yet in almost all cases the effects of a particular electoral system choice have a profound effect on the future political life of the country concerned. In most cases electoral systems, once chosen, tend to remain relatively unchanged for long periods, as political interests quickly congeal around and respond to the incentives presented by the system. Because electoral laws, once established, must be changed by politicians elected under the old system, there is a strong in-built inertia in all electoral systems. Changes to electoral systems typically occur at times of political crisis where public confidence in the existing system has been severely shaken (Italy in 1993), as a bargaining weapon for parliamentary support in a hung parliament (Japan in 1994) or by a combination of political miscalculation and a significant public desire for change (New Zealand 1994). But by and large, electoral systems tend to be constant factors rather than variables in most political systems, and thus the question of the most appropriate electoral system to choose is one of the most important constitutional issues facing new democracies.

An electoral system is designed to do three main jobs. First, it will translate the votes cast into seats won in a legislative chamber or presidential office, and will often thus have a major influence upon the formation of governments. Even with the exact same

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<sup>8</sup> This discussion draws on a similar section in Reynolds and Reilly 1997.

number of votes for parties, one system might lead to a coalition government while another to a single party assuming majority control. Secondly, electoral systems act as the conduit through which the people can hold their elected representatives accountable, in terms of both their performance as representatives and their 'geographic accountability' to their electorate. Most electoral systems build in some element of constituency representation, with single-member district systems seen as maximising this factor and the large, multi-member districts associated with proportional representation seen as minimising it. Third, different electoral systems serve to structure the incentives for those competing for power in distinct ways, rewarding some forms of behaviour while penalising others. Some systems, for example, require candidates from the same party to compete with each other for votes, thus encouraging individualistic campaigns, while others make the contest for election the exclusive preserve of political parties, thus maximising the power of party leaders.

There are countless electoral system variations, but essentially they can be split into ten main systems which fall into three broad families: plurality-majority systems; semi-proportional systems; and proportional representation (PR) systems. These constitute the major electoral system variations used for national elections in the world today.

### Plurality-majority systems

The five types of plurality-majority systems comprise two plurality systems, first past the post and the block vote, and three majority systems, and the two-round system, the alternative vote and the contingent vote. The distinguishing feature of all of these systems is that they usually utilise single-member electoral districts, and thus lead to majoritarian results.

Under a *First Past the Post* (FPTP) system the winner is the candidate who gains the most votes, but not necessarily an absolute majority of the votes. FPTP electoral contests are held in single-member districts, voters choose their favoured candidate with a tick or a cross on the ballot paper, and the winner is simply the candidate who gains a plurality of votes. FPTP is the world's most commonly-used electoral system for both presidential and parliamentary elections (Reynolds and Reilly 1997, 19). Countries using this system include the United Kingdom, the United States, India, Canada, and most countries that were once part of the British Empire.

The *Block Vote* (BV) is the application of FPTP in multi- rather than single-member districts. Voters have as many votes as there are seats to be filled, and the highest-polling candidates fill the positions regardless of the percentage of the vote they actually achieve. This system is used in some parts of Asia and the Middle East. A further variation on the block vote is the 'party block' system used in Singapore, where voters choose between parties rather than candidates, and the highest-polling party wins all seats in the district.

The most common form of majority system, the *two-round system* (TRS), takes place in two rounds of voting, often a week or a fortnight apart. The first round is conducted in the same way as a normal FPTP election. If a candidate receives an absolute majority of the vote, then he or she is elected outright, with no need for a second ballot. If, however, no candidate has received an absolute majority, then a second round of voting is conducted, usually as a run-off between the two highest polling candidates from the first-round, and the winner of this round is declared elected.<sup>9</sup> This system is widely used for presidential elections, and also for legislative elections in France, most former French colonies, and some parts of the former Soviet Union.

The *alternative vote* (AV) is another type of majority system. Like elections under FPTP, AV elections are usually held in single-member districts. Unlike FPTP, however, AV enables electors to *rank* candidates in the order of their choice, by marking a '1' for their favoured candidate, '2' for their second choice, '3' for their third choice, and so on. The system thus enables voters to express their preferences between candidates, rather than simply their first choice. If no candidate has over 50 percent of first-preferences, lower order preference votes are transferred until a majority winner emerges. This system is currently used in Australia, Nauru and for presidential elections in Ireland. As much of this thesis discusses, it was also used in Papua New Guinea from 1964-1975.

A final type of majority system, the *contingent vote* (CV), can be seen as a mid-point between AV and TRS. Under this system, voters mark their preferences on the ballot

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<sup>9</sup>A variant on this procedure is used for legislative elections in France, the country most often associated with the two-round system. For these elections, any candidate who has received the votes of over 12.5 per cent of the registered electorate in the first round can stand in the second round. Whoever wins the highest numbers of votes in the second round is then declared elected, regardless of whether they have won an absolute majority or not.

paper in the same way as under an AV system. However, if no candidate has a majority of first preference votes, the election is decided by simultaneously eliminating all candidates bar the top two from the count, and redistributing all available preferences to one or the other of these two leaders to determine the winner. The CV is thus an instant run-off system which takes place in one round, rather than the two rounds needed for TRS. This system is used today for presidential elections in Sri Lanka.

### Semi-proportional systems

Semi-proportional systems are those which translate votes cast into seats won in a way that falls somewhere in between the proportionality of PR systems and the majoritarianism of plurality-majority systems. The two semi-PR electoral systems used for legislative elections are the single non-transferable vote, and parallel (or mixed) systems.

In a *single non-transferable vote* (SNTV) system, each elector has one vote but there are several seats in the district to be filled, and the candidates with the highest number of votes fill these positions. This means that in a four-member district, for example, one would on average need only just over 20% of the vote to be elected. This system is used today only in Jordan and Vanuatu, but is most often associated with Japan, which used SNTV until 1993.

*Parallel* systems use both PR lists (see below) and single-member districts running side-by-side (hence the term 'parallel'). Part of the parliament is elected by proportional representation, part by some type of plurality or majority method. Parallel systems have been widely adopted by new democracies in the 1990s, perhaps because, on the face of it, they appear to combine the benefits of PR lists with single-member district representation.

### Proportional representation systems

The rationale underpinning proportional representation (PR) systems is to closely approximate a party's share of the national vote with its share of parliamentary seats. For example, if a major party wins 40 percent of the votes, it should also win approximately 40 percent of the seats, and a minor party with 10 percent of the votes should similarly gain 10 percent of the parliamentary seats.

*List PR* systems are the most common type of proportional representation electoral system. Most forms of list PR are held in large, multi-member districts which maximise proportionality but minimise geographic accountability. List PR requires each party to present a list of candidates to the electorate. Electors vote for a party rather than a candidate; and parties receive seats in proportion to their overall share of the national vote. Winning candidates are usually taken from the lists in order of their respective positions. This system is widely used in continental Europe, Latin America and southern Africa.

*Mixed member proportional* (MMP) systems, used in Germany, New Zealand, South Korea, Bolivia, Italy, Mexico, Venezuela, and Hungary, attempt to combine the positive attributes of both majoritarian and PR electoral systems. A proportion of the parliament (approximately half in the cases of Germany and New Zealand) is elected from single-member districts, while the remainder is constituted by PR lists, with the PR seats being used to compensate for any disproportionality produced by the district seat results. By using some single-member districts, MMP also ensures that voters have geographical representation.

Finally, the *single transferable vote* (STV) form of PR uses multi-member districts, with voters ranking candidates in order of preference on the ballot paper in the same manner as the alternative vote. After all first-preference votes are tallied, the count begins by establishing the 'quota' of votes required for the election of a single candidate. Any candidate who has more first preferences than the quota is immediately elected. If no-one has achieved the quota, the candidate with the lowest number of first preferences is eliminated, with his or her second preferences being redistributed to the candidates left in the race. At the same time, the surplus votes of elected candidates (i.e. those votes above the quota) are redistributed according to the second preferences on the ballot papers until all seats for the constituency are filled. At the national level, this system is used in Ireland, Malta and the Australian Senate.

Of these ten forms of electoral system used in the world today, three enable electors to rank-order candidates in the order of their choice on the ballot, and are thus what we call *preferential* systems: the alternative vote (AV), the contingent vote (CV), and the single transferable vote (STV). In this thesis, the term 'preferential' is used to refer to any of these three voting systems which utilise preference marking. The terms AV, CV and

STV will be used when discussing a particular system. There are, however, differences in nomenclature between different regions. In Australia (where voters must rank order *all* candidates on the ballot paper) the alternative vote is usually known as the 'preferential vote'. In Papua New Guinea (where the marking of preferences was optional) the system is also known as the 'preferential vote' or sometimes the 'optional preferential vote' (OPV). Both of these are synonymous with the term 'AV', which will be used whenever possible in this thesis.

### **Centripetalism versus consociationalism**

Advocates of constitutional engineering are in widespread agreement that the electoral system is a key mechanism in shaping the wider political arena. Horowitz, for example, argues that "the electoral system is by far the most powerful lever of constitutional engineering for accommodation and harmony in severely divided societies, as indeed it is a powerful tool for many other purposes" (1991a, 163), while Lijphart says that "the electoral system has long been recognized as probably the most powerful instrument for shaping the political system" (1991a, 91). Sisk writes that electoral systems "play an important role in 'engineering' the results of democratic voting, and along with other institutional choices can have a profound impact on the nature of political parties and the general character of democracy" (1993, 79). Beyond this consensus on the importance of electoral systems, however, there is profound disagreement between theorists as to which electoral systems are most appropriate for divided societies.

Two schools of thought predominate. The scholarly orthodoxy has long rejected majoritarian approaches and instead argued that some form of proportional representation (PR) is all but essential if democracy is to survive the travails of deep-rooted ethnic divisions. For example, Sir Arthur Lewis's experience of the failure of post-colonial democracy in countries such as Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone in the late 1950s and 1960s prompted him to argue that a divided society

needs a system which will give minorities adequate representation, discourage parochialism, and force moderation on the political parties ... proportional representation with a few large several-member constituencies is better than electoral systems with many single-member constituencies. (1965, 73).

The most prominent advocate of this orthodoxy is Arend Lijphart, who is primarily responsible for the development and prominence of *consociationalism* as a model for



managing ethnic cleavages in divided societies. Consociationalism emphasises the need for divided societies to develop mechanisms for elite power-sharing if democracy is to survive the travails of ethnic or other conflicts. The mechanisms for ensuring sustainable power-sharing arrangements are encapsulated in four key features: grand coalition governments in which all ethnic groups are represented; proportional representation of different groups in the distribution of legislative seats and in the civil service; segmental autonomy via federalism or similar devices; and a power of veto over key decisions by minority groups (Lijphart 1977). Lijphart developed this institutional prescription from a detailed examination of the features of power-sharing democracy in some continental European countries (the Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland), and there is disagreement over how far these measures can work when applied to ethnic conflict in developing countries (if at all).<sup>10</sup> However, there is little doubt that consociationalism represents the dominant — and according to Lijphart, the *only* — model of democratic government for divided societies.<sup>11</sup> In terms of electoral systems, consociationalists argue that list PR forms of proportional representation are by far the best choice for divided societies, as they enable all politically-significant ethnic groups, including minorities, access to legislative representation, while minimising ‘wasted’ votes and maximising the likelihood of coalition governments (Lijphart 1990, 13). List PR in large districts is particularly favoured, as it has been shown to maximise proportionality (and hence the chances for even small minorities to gain representation), and because it is a relatively simple system for both voters and electoral officials to use and understand. This enables ethnic groups to “define themselves” into several large, ethnically-based parties which can then form the basis of an ‘oversized’ government coalition (Lijphart 1990, 10-11).

By contrast, some scholars argue that the best way to mitigate the destructive effects of ethnicity in divided societies is not to simply replicate existing ethnic divisions in the legislature, but rather to utilise electoral systems that encourage co-operation and accommodation between rival groups, and that therefore tend to break down the salience of ethnicity rather than foster its representation in parliament. The theoretical basis for this approach owes much to arguments put forward by Donald L. Horowitz in *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (1985) and *A Democratic South Africa? Constitutional Engineering*

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<sup>10</sup> See Horowitz 1991b, 451-76; Sisk 1996, 27-45.

<sup>11</sup> See Lijphart 1991d, 491-509.

in a *Divided Society* (1991), both of which deal with the need for divided societies to adopt political institutions which encourage moderation and accommodation on the part of political actors. The broad approach to the management of ethnic conflict presented in these works centres on the need for divided societies to adopt 'integrative' mechanisms and institutions — that is, institutions which encourage integration across communal divides (Sisk 1995, 35). Integrative institutions promote accommodation between rival groups and moderation on the part of rational politicians by offering them incentives to appeal to voters outside their own communal segments. Electoral incentives reward those politicians, leading to the election of moderate political leaders committed to accommodative policies.

The most powerful 'integrative' institution available to constitutional engineers, according to Horowitz (1991a, 163), is the electoral system. Some electoral systems, such as that used for presidential elections in Nigeria, can be structured in such a way as to require the winning candidate to gain support from different regions, thus helping to break down the claims of narrow parochialism or regionalism. Others attempt to defuse the importance of ethnicity by pre-assigning ethnic proportions in parliament and in each constituency, thus forcing parties to present the same balance of ethnically-mixed slates of candidates and making voters choose between them on issues other than ethnicity, as at parliamentary elections in Lebanon. However, the most powerful electoral systems for divided societies are those which actively attempt to break down the salience of ethnicity by promoting accommodation and bargaining across ethnic lines. Certain electoral systems which enable electors to rank candidates in the order of their choice on the ballot — that is, those we call *preferential* systems — can provide parties and candidates in divided societies with an incentive to 'pool votes' via the exchange of preferences between their supporters. Parties which broaden their support base in search of second preferences from other groups are more likely to win seats than parties which are unable to garner preferences outside their own communal group. This can in turn provide parties seeking these lower-order preferences from other groups with an incentive towards moderation and accommodation on ethnic issues, and can thus have substantial impacts upon the prospects for sustainable democracy in divided societies.

At the core of this approach is the need “to make politicians reciprocally dependent on the votes of members of groups other than their own” (Horowitz 1991b, 471). Under a preferential voting system, Horowitz argues, many elections will turn on second and third preferences. Parties that succeed in negotiating for second and third preferences will be rewarded, thus presenting them with a strong incentive to moderate their policy positions on key ethnic issues so as to broaden their appeal. Of the preferential systems, Horowitz favours the alternative vote (AV) (1991a, chap. 5) and the contingent vote (CV) (1985, 639-42) — both majority systems rather than proportional ones. He argues that the more common plurality-majority system, FPTP, is likely to result in the exclusion of minorities and to intensify conflict in divided societies (1985, 164, 202). Horowitz does not reject proportional alternatives out of hand, noting that if the choice is between PR and FPTP, then proportional systems are to be preferred, but that “STV is a far better choice than list-system PR” (1985, 171, 173). The difference between the two is that preferential systems can harness the forces of moderation at the local level: rather than relying on political leaders to behave accommodatively after an election, they can instead encourage the formation “of electoral coalitions *by constituents* as they specify their second or third preferences beyond their narrow group interests” (Sisk 1995, 38, emphasis in original). The result, Horowitz argues, will be the formation of pre-election pacts or multi-ethnic coalitions, resulting in strong and enduring “coalitions of commitment” in government, as opposed to the weak and tenuous “coalitions of convenience” which he sees as characterising consociational agreements (1985, 365-95).

Horowitz’s recommendations for constitutional engineering stood as the centrepiece of a package of institutional devices designed to mitigate the destructive effects of ethnic conflict by breaking down the salience of ethnic issues in electoral politics and integrating them into other broader and less damaging cross-cutting cleavages. Horowitz identifies four other mechanisms which characterise his approach to moderating the potentially harmful effects of inter-ethnic competition: arrangements which proliferate the points of power “so as to take the heat off a single focal point”, such as a constitutional separation of powers or federalism; devolution or ethnically-reserved offices to foster intra-ethnic conflict at the local level; public policies which encourage the growth of less damaging ‘cross-cutting cleavages’, such as class identification, to act as counterweights to ethnic identification; and measures which serve to reduce inter-ethnic inequalities and disparities “so that dissatisfaction declines”

(1985, 597-600). Sisk has argued that this approach is accurately described as *centripetalism*, “because the explicit aim is to engineer a centripetal spin to the political system — to pull the parties towards moderate, compromising policies and to discover and reinforce the centre of a deeply divided political spectrum” (1995, 19). Following Sisk, the term ‘centripetalism’ will be used in this thesis to describe a political system or strategy designed to focus competition at the moderate centre rather than the extremes by making politicians seek electoral support from groups other than their own ethnic community.

### **Supporting evidence for centripetalism**

A recurring criticism of centripetal theories in general, and the case for preferential voting methods in particular, has focused on a lack of real world examples (Sisk 1996, 44). This thesis defends the case for centripetalism and the accommodative incentives of preferential electoral methods by drawing on new evidence, not cited by either Horowitz or Lijphart, from the electoral history of Papua New Guinea (PNG), an ethnically-fragmented state in the South Pacific in which both AV and FPTP electoral systems have been used. PNG provides a unique opportunity to study the effects of different electoral system in a divided, but nonetheless robustly democratic, state. It thus facilitates meaningful evaluations of the impact of these systems, and particularly the arguments advanced for the integrative effects of AV. PNG used an AV system for its first three mass-suffrage elections in 1964, 1968 and 1972, when it was an Australian Territory (comprising an Australian colony, Papua, and a United Nations Trust Territory, ex-League of Nations Mandate, New Guinea, administered as a single unit) undergoing preparation for decolonisation and independence. The three elections held during this period represent the *only* national example of AV parliamentary elections in what could be argued to be a divided society to date, and are thus deserving of serious examination when evaluating Horowitz’s proposals.

While the implications of the PNG case for the arguments for and against centripetalism will be examined in detail in Chapter Six, it is important to note at this stage that until now virtually no empirical evidence has been put forward in support of the integrative effects of AV in an ethnically-divided society, resulting in substantial criticism of

Horowitz's arguments.<sup>12</sup> This thesis — and the published articles and book chapters based on its research<sup>13</sup> — attempts to provide this missing evidence. The PNG case functions as what Eckstein (1992, 117-76) calls a 'crucial case study' for the theoretical arguments for centripetalism: that is, a case study which provides the key test of a theory's validity, and a more rigorous assessment than even a large-N comparative study.

However, one case rarely provides sufficient evidence on which to build a theory. A more appropriate approach is to use a combination of case-study and comparative analysis. This thesis therefore combines both a focussed 'crucial case study' approach, via sustained examination of PNG, with a wider comparative analysis which examines the effects of preferential electoral systems in states such as Sri Lanka, Fiji, and Australia. The combined evidence from these cases suggests that, under certain conditions, AV electoral methods can indeed encourage co-operative political behaviour and accommodative outcomes. However, the evidence also suggests that the applicability of the centripetal model is highly dependent upon socio-structural conditions, particularly the size, number and geographic dispersion of contending ethnic groups, and is likely to lead to accommodative outcomes only under certain facilitating conditions. This thesis thus attempts to provide validating evidence for an as yet largely-unsubstantiated theory, but also to circumscribe and limit the applicability of the theory. The implications of this will be discussed in detail in the concluding chapter.

By combining case and comparative study, this thesis is part of a widespread synthesising trend in political science in which the 'new institutionalism' has stimulated political scientists to

no longer think in either/or terms of science or story-telling, wide-ranging cross-national comparisons or carefully crafted case studies unique unto themselves: virtually all serious students of the subject now see the merit in attending to local detail and appreciate the possibilities of systematic, statistically compelling study even in small-N situations (Goodin and Klingemann, 1996, 12).

In reality, some type of comparative method informs most if not all empirical political studies, because in most cases it is only by comparing the performance of states, governments or any other political variable that meaningful judgements can be made

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<sup>12</sup> See Sisk 1996, 44, 62; Diamond and Plattner 1994, xxiv.

<sup>13</sup> These are: Reilly 1996, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1997d.

about their relative merits (Lane and Ersson 1994, 1). The significance of the comparative methodology to this thesis is twofold. First, comparative politics has tended to be strongly institutionalist in approach: its aim has traditionally been to develop an understanding of how different institutional mechanisms work within different contexts. Lane and Ersson, for example, argue that comparative politics “implicitly or explicitly ... discusses questions about the institutional structure of the state as it affects stability and performance” (1994, 26). One example of this focus is the contention that political institutions, if suitably designed, contribute towards a state’s democratic prospects — an argument classically put by John Stuart Mill in the nineteenth century and advanced by many political scientists since. The other reason comparative politics is significant to this thesis is its concern with normative issues. The normative dimension of political science implies, amongst other things, a capacity on the part of political scientists to specify particular courses of action, such as institutional reform or policy programs, which can be used to guide states towards particular outcomes. In this way, research findings such as those presented in this thesis can have substantial public policy implications.

It is important to note that, while the evidence put forward in this thesis suggests that AV can indeed encourage accommodation in divided societies, this is not always in the same ways or for the same reasons as those postulated by Horowitz. Likewise, the conclusions of this thesis, while broadly consistent with Horowitz’s arguments, differ from his in a number of important respects, particularly in the area of appropriate electoral system choice and the importance of social and demographic factors in limiting the application of centripetal prescriptions. Nonetheless, the foundations (if not the conclusions) of the arguments for the accommodative effects of preferential voting systems put forward in this thesis owe a clear, and acknowledged, intellectual debt to Horowitz’s work.<sup>14</sup>

### **The PNG case and its relevance**

As Horowitz (1985, 602) himself has noted, now and then political systems create quasi-experimental conditions under which propositions can be tested. The use of two

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<sup>14</sup> Similarly, many of the techniques employed for analysing the effects of electoral systems owe a debt to the pioneering comparative work of Arend Lijphart, but the conclusions are different to (and sometimes in opposition to) Lijphart’s own.

different electoral systems in PNG — AV from 1964-1975 and FPTP from 1975 onwards — provides the type of quasi-experimental conditions necessary to evaluate the impact of these systems. While there were several significant changes to other variables at the same time as the change of electoral system in PNG (especially the attainment of independence and the withdrawal of the Australian colonial apparatus in 1975), the major elements of a competitive political system (e.g. an elected legislature, mass suffrage elections, a nascent party system) were already in place prior to the change of electoral rules. Many of the political actors quoted or cited in this study experienced elections under both systems and are thus able to compare their experiences under the two systems. It is therefore possible to make meaningful and specific comparisons about the effects of the two electoral systems in a way that would not be possible under a country-by-country study. This is particularly important because AV and FPTP are often discussed as if they were variations of the same system in terms of results and consequences (Rae 1971, 108). Critics of centripetalism have queried whether “the incentives for moderation inherent in the alternative vote are much greater than incentives in other majoritarian systems” and suggested that differences between the two are likely to be negligible (Lijphart 1995b, 863). The evidence from PNG refutes both claims: there is strong evidence, presented in Chapter Four, that AV and FPTP had quite different effects upon party system development, levels of candidature and, most particularly, the incentives for moderation or violence presented to candidates and their supporters.

Papua New Guinea remains an obscure and poorly-understood example of a functioning multi-ethnic democracy in the developing world. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, the PNG case has many lessons for students of comparative politics. The most important reason for urging greater attention to PNG in the field of comparative politics is simply its longevity as a participatory competitive democracy. In this respect PNG, like its national symbol, the *kumul*,<sup>15</sup> is a rare bird: an ethnically-fragmented and economically underdeveloped country in the ‘Third World’ which has nonetheless maintained, over a long period (more than 30 years), democratic government and meaningful elections. A number of comparative studies have confirmed PNG’s unusual status in this regard. Myron Weiner’s study of elections in the developing world, for

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<sup>15</sup> The tokpisin word for ‘bird of paradise’.

example, found that PNG was one of a select group of six developing countries with populations over one million that had remained more or less continuously democratic since independence (the others were India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago) (Weiner 1987, 18-19). A similar but more recent formulation found PNG one of a group of ten developing countries with populations above one million that had maintained democracy, or at least a constitutional 'near-democracy', continuously from 1965 (the others were India, Sri Lanka, Costa Rica, Colombia, Venezuela, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Botswana and Mauritius) (Diamond 1992, 127). Reviewing the findings of their monumental four-volume, 26-nation study of democracy in developing countries, Diamond, Linz and Lipset found that PNG was one of a select group of five developing countries that could be classified as 'stable democracies' (the others were Venezuela, Costa Rica, India and Botswana). (Diamond, Linz and Lipset 1995, 35). And, in the forthcoming second edition of Lijphart's classic work *Democracies*, PNG is one of only four developing countries that are also classified as 'established' democracies — defined as countries with a population of over 250,000 which are democratic now and have been continuously democratic for at least 20 years (India, Mauritius and Trinidad and Tobago being the others).<sup>16</sup>

Other studies of democratic *consolidation* have further emphasised PNG's unique status amongst developing-world democracies. Power and Gasiorowski's (1997) examination of the outcomes of 56 transitions to democracy in the Third World between 1930 and 1995, for example, found that Papua New Guinea was, along with India, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, one of the developing world's only 'consolidated' parliamentary democracies.<sup>17</sup> Democratic consolidation was measured by the presence of three criteria: the holding of a second election subsequent to the democratic transition (which, in many cases, coincided with the granting of independence); at least one alternation in executive power; and 12 years of democratic experience (Power and Gasiorowski 1997, 132-33). Another more demanding test of consolidation is provided by Huntington's 'two-turnover test', which occurs when the party or group that takes power in an initial election loses a subsequent election and turns over power to those election winners, and if those election winners then peacefully turn over power to the

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<sup>16</sup> Personal communication, Professor Arend Lijphart, University of California at San Diego, 13 August 1997.

<sup>17</sup> Consolidated presidential democracies were Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, and Venezuela.



winners of a later election (1991, 266-67). This criterion would result in the exclusion of a number of the above countries, such as Botswana and Malaysia (neither of which has experienced a change of government party yet), but would be easily met by PNG. The paucity of cases outside the developed west which could meet either of these relatively undemanding tests of democratic consolidation emphasise just how far Papua New Guinea — with its five post-independence elections, eight transitions of government and over 30 years of continuous democratic experience — deviates from the comparative norm.

PNG also has some of the *least* favourable social and economic conditions for democratic success, including high levels of unemployment and violent crime and low levels of literacy, education and per capita GDP.<sup>18</sup> As Table 1.1 shows, on almost all indicators of economic and social development, PNG ranks near the bottom compared to other 'continuous democracies or near-democracies' in the developing world. Amongst this group, its literacy rate is lower than all others bar Botswana and India. Its Gross Domestic Product per capita is lower than all except India. Similarly, PNG's ranking on the United Nation's Index of Human Development (a composite measure of socio-economic indicators which includes information on health, education and unemployment levels), is higher only than the South Asian countries. In comparative terms, there is a strong relationship between a low score on these indicators and democratic instability.<sup>19</sup> And yet, as we have seen, PNG has one of the most successful and unbroken democratic records of this entire group.

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<sup>18</sup> See United Nations Development Programme 1997.

<sup>19</sup> For a summary of knowledge to date, see Lipset 1995, 350-56.

**Table 1.1: Indicators of Economic and Social Development in Developing-World Democracies**

	Population	Area (sq. km)	Literacy Rate (%)	GDP (US dollars)	HDI Index
Botswana	1,443,000	582,000	68.0	2,658	0.741
Colombia	34,520,000	1,142,000	90.6	1,873	0.840
Costa Rica	3,071,000	51,100	94.5	2,729	0.884
India	952,590,000	3,167,000	43.6	311	0.436
Jamaica	2,411,000	11,430	84.1	1,593	0.702
Mauritius	1,070,000	2,040	81.7	2,515	0.825
Papua New Guinea	4,107,000	462,840	70.5	1,058	0.504
Sri Lanka	17,865,000	65,610	89.6	656	0.698
Trinidad & Tobago	1,237,000	5,130	97.6	4,217	0.872
Venezuela	20,712,000	912,050	90.6	2,897	0.859

Source: International IDEA 1997. Figures are based on those present at most recent elections as of May 1997.

In many ways PNG also operates as a salutary correction to some of the more complacent findings of comparative political scientists in the electoral studies field. To take but one example: under Duverger's well-known 'sociological law' concerning the relationship between electoral and party systems, PNG's first-past-the-post electoral system should have produced a relatively stable two-party system.<sup>20</sup> In fact, the PNG party system, such as it exists at all, is characterised by a weak and highly-fragmented multipartism and other factors which, according to Ghai, are usually associated with proportional representation: "multiple parties, large candidature, coalitions, and weak governments" (1988, 73). As noted earlier, one explanation for this divergence between theory and practice lies in the almost entirely Western focus of traditional electoral studies, many of which are based exclusively on examination of elections in industrialised countries only.<sup>21</sup> Another reason for comparative politics specialists to give more attention to PNG is because it provides another relatively unusual case: a country that has changed from one electoral system to a different one. While incremental adjustments to electoral laws are relatively common, examples of wholesale electoral system change remain unusual, given the in-built inertia of electoral laws.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> First formulated in Duverger 1954.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Bogdanor and Butler 1983; Farrell 1997.

<sup>22</sup> See Rose 1983, 42-43.

This has traditionally hampered the comparative study of electoral systems: most discussions require a particular system in one country to be compared with a similar system in a different country. Even for two very similar polities, the vast number of different variables in a country-to-country comparison makes it difficult to assess the effect of a single constant such as an electoral system in isolation from the rest of a political system. This means that it is often difficult to make substantial assessments about the effects of one system or another: we are not comparing like with like. This thesis, by contrast, compares two different electoral systems — one of which (AV) is unusual by world standards — in one polity, PNG, over a period of over 30 years.

Papua New Guinea's political institutions have not received a great deal of academic attention. There has been an invaluable series of election studies published after every PNG election to date<sup>23</sup>, but with one or two exceptions these have concentrated overwhelmingly on a seat-by-seat description and analysis of election campaigns, with minimal attention paid to formal election rules or the way these rules influence styles of political competition. This reflects the preoccupations of the respective authors and editors: PNG elections are often interpreted as clashes between traditional culture and the modern world of representative politics, the “counterpoint between traditional and modern bases for status-competition” in the words of one author (Strathern 1976, 283). Most election studies to date have implicitly viewed elections as an arena in which the forces of tradition and modernity can be played out, and in which the social customs and obligations of voters and candidates play a dominant role. The formal rules of the electoral system, by contrast, have tended to be seen as being of marginal importance. In part, this reflects the traditional dominance among the social science disciplines of anthropology in studies of PNG, which has long represented something of a Mecca for anthropologists due to the diversity and isolation from external influences of many of its traditional societies. A considerable amount of research and scholarship on politics in PNG, including electoral studies, has been conducted not by political scientists but by anthropologists, who have understandably given more attention to social forces than political institutions.<sup>24</sup> The comparative lack of attention to the impacts of modern political institutions has hampered a comprehensive understanding of the political

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<sup>23</sup> These are: Bettison, Hughes and van der Veur 1965; Epstein, Parker and Reay 1971; Stone 1976; Hegarty 1983; King 1989, Oliver 1989; Saffu 1996.

<sup>24</sup> Amongst the scholars cited in this thesis, Marie Reay, Andrew Strathern and Bill Standish are all anthropologists by training.

process in PNG, and led to a tendency to ascribe the causes for political activity overwhelmingly to traditional 'cultural' factors, with insufficient attention given to the rational calculations made by PNG's political actors as they interact with PNG's political institutions.

This thesis will attempt to show that many of the features of PNG's electoral politics usually seen as having social, cultural or other explanations are often influenced by, and sometimes reactions to, the incentives presented by the electoral system. In examining and giving prominence to an 'institutionalist' line of inquiry in this thesis, the centrality of political culture to questions of political behaviour and democratic performance may sometimes appear to have been forgotten. This is emphatically not the case. The reasons advanced in Chapter Two for PNG's somewhat surprising democratic success are essentially cultural ones: the combination of traditional social structures of political leadership with the constitutionalism and willingness to abide by the 'rules of the game' inculcated amongst the political elite by the Australian colonial administration. A nation's political culture is also, however, extraordinarily difficult to manipulate and almost impossible to change from above. By contrast, political institutions such as constitutions and electoral systems are considerably less influential but, unlike a nation's historical or socio-economic situation, can be changed with relative ease. The aim of this thesis is essentially to explore the question of *which* political institutions will best work to promote peaceful and effective democratic government in a particular social setting. This type of institutionalist inquiry is necessarily, as Juan Linz has noted, "a modest quest, but a worthy one" (1996, 161).

## **Conclusion**

Because of the relative obscurity of PNG for many political scientists, and its unusual status as a competitive democracy in the developing world, part of this thesis will necessarily deal with the history of competitive democracy in PNG. Chapter Two argues that PNG is in many ways a deviant case for students of comparative politics, and one which challenges a number of well-established theories concerning the relationship between democratic sustainability, ethnic fragmentation and political institutions. Chapters Three and Four of this thesis present a description and analysis of elections in PNG, from the first elections in 1964 until the most recent elections in

1997. By accumulating and calculating data on voting trends such as party vote shares, turnover of MPs, margins of victory, turnout rates, party hopping, seats won and other electoral outcomes, this thesis provides the data and analysis to enable the PNG case to be incorporated more fully into the wider field of comparative politics.<sup>25</sup> Chapter Four concentrates on the core hypothesis of this thesis: the extent to which co-operative political behaviour and accommodative outcomes were encouraged by PNG's centripetal political institutions in the pre-independence period, and the extent to which this behaviour changed as PNG political actors responded to the new 'rules of the game' after independence.

While Chapters Two through Four are exclusively devoted to PNG, Chapters Five to Eight are comparative. Despite the evidence from PNG in support of centripetal theories presented in Chapter Four, it would be unwise to put too much weight on the PNG example alone, especially considering the unusually fragmented nature of PNG society and the colonial environment in which the relevant elections were held. For this reason, it is important to examine other ethnically-divided societies in which similar electoral arrangements have been adopted to attempt to encourage inter-ethnic accommodation. There are two such cases: Fiji, which in 1997 introduced an AV electoral system for all future elections for this very purpose; and Sri Lanka, which has used a CV system to elect its President since 1978. These two cases are examined in Chapter Five and are found to provide mostly speculative but still important evidence to support the findings of the PNG case.

Having presented the key data from those divided societies in which centripetal institutions have been used, the remainder of the thesis evaluates the implications of the material presented. Chapter Six assesses the specific implications of the PNG, Fiji and Sri Lanka cases for the arguments for and against centripetal theories of democracy in divided societies as advanced by Horowitz, Lijphart, Sisk and others. It also looks at the experience of AV elections in Australia, the longest-running example of the system. Although Australia is an ethnically-diverse society, it is not an ethnically-divided society, in the sense of ethnicity representing a fundamental political cleavage around which political interests are formed and mobilised, and so cannot be used to directly

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<sup>25</sup> For example, the second edition of Arend Lijphart's *Democracies* (forthcoming), which utilises data from this thesis.

evaluate arguments for or against centripetalism. Australia does offer, however, the case which best illustrates the way preference-swapping can promote tangible policy changes on the part of parties and governments. Chapter Six concludes by examining the strengths and weaknesses of the theoretical case for AV as an instrument for managing ethnic conflict, finding it to be most applicable to situations where there is a degree of fluidity to ethnic identities and relationships.

Although most of the evidence presented in the earlier chapters concerns the alternative vote, this is not the only preferential electoral system that has been recommended by centripetal enthusiasts. Chapter Seven therefore examines the comparative experience of preferential voting systems around the world. There are three forms of preferential electoral system used for national elections: the alternative vote; the single transferable vote; and the contingent vote. These systems can themselves be further broken down according to whether the system makes the numbering of all preferences compulsory or leaves the decision as to whether to mark preferences beyond the first in the hands of the voter; and, in the case of AV and CV, whether it is used in single-member districts or multi-member districts. Examination of the experience of these variations suggests that not all preferential systems are equally effective at promoting accommodation in divided societies, and that apparently minor technical differences between systems can have major effects in terms of outcomes.

The concluding Chapter of this thesis attempts to put the collected evidence for centripetalism in context. On the basis of the evidence and analysis presented in the preceding chapters, some general facilitating conditions for centripetal approaches to democracy in divided societies are suggested. The central conclusion is that the application of the centripetal model is highly dependent upon socio-structural conditions — particularly the size, number and geographic dispersion of the contending ethnic groups. To be effective, centripetal electoral approaches require ethnically-heterogeneous electoral districts, and are thus likely to work effectively only in situations of extreme ethnic fragmentation (such as Papua New Guinea) or in situations where competing groups are widely dispersed and inter-mixed (such as in Fiji). While uncommon in some regions, there are numerous examples of this type of ethnic group distribution in the Asia-Pacific region, due in part to the influences of colonialism and the presence of large Chinese and Indian diasporas. In addition, all the identified

examples of centripetalism occur in Asia-Pacific states. It is thus likely that centripetal institutions may offer the most appropriate choices for engineering accommodative politics in many of the ethnically-divided states of the Asia-Pacific region in particular, and more generally in situations of high ethnic group inter-mixture or fragmentation in other regions.

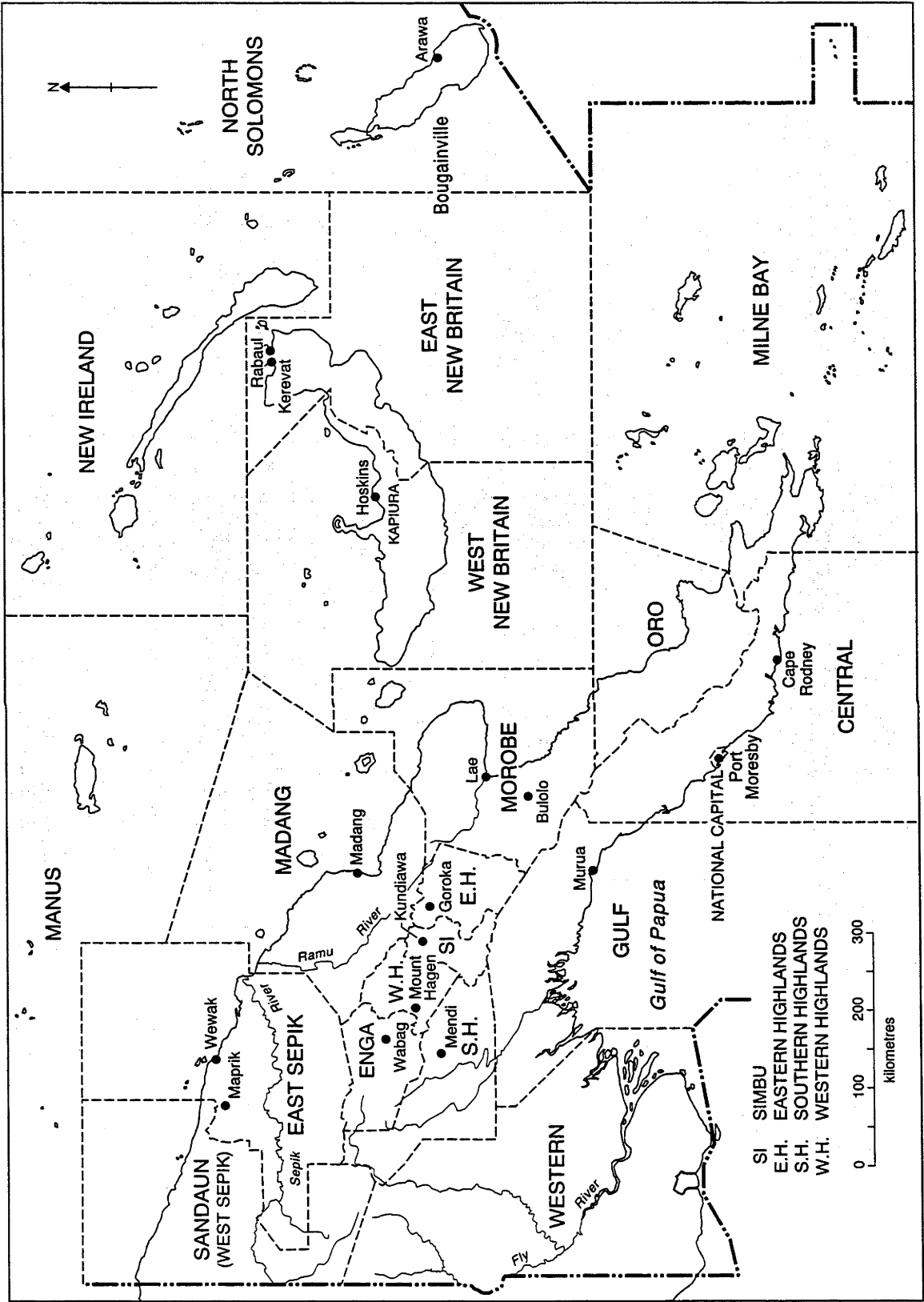
## **Chapter Two: Representative democracy in PNG — a deviant case?**

The state of Papua New Guinea (PNG) comprises roughly half of the world's second largest island, New Guinea, and about 600 smaller islands. It shares its western border with Irian Jaya, a province of Indonesia (see Map One). PNG was formed by the merger at independence of the Territory of Papua, which had been under Australian rule from 1906, with the Trust Territory of New Guinea, which had been a German colonial territory from 1884 to 1914, and had thenceforth been administered by Australia — first under military rule, then under a League of Nations mandate granted in 1920, and later under United Nations trusteeship from 1945. The two territories were jointly administered by Australia as an administrative union until 1975. The Territory of Papua New Guinea became self-governing in December 1973 and attained full independence on 16 September 1975.

PNG is home to approximately 4 million people, predominantly of Melanesian race. Traditional forms of social organisation play an important role in PNG society, and continue to be significant influences upon the conduct of modern representative politics. The practice of representative democracy in PNG is characterised by a diffuse and fragmented party system, high candidacy rates, very low support levels for some successful candidates, vote-splitting, low party identification on the part of the electorate, high turnover of politicians from one election to the next, and frequent 'party-hopping' on the part of MPs. Political parties are weak and tend to coalesce around personalities rather than issues or ideologies, although they do play a limited role in mobilising and campaigning at election time and in the formation of governments following elections.



Map One: Papua New Guinea



The highly fragmented nature of much of PNG society means that there is a greater number of politicised 'ethnic groups' in PNG than in almost any comparable country. In fact, with over 800 distinct languages spoken by several thousand competing clan-based ethnic polities, PNG is almost certainly the world's most ethnically heterogeneous state in terms of the sheer numbers of independent ethno-linguistic groups. The conventional wisdom is that such a level of ethnic diversity poses significant challenges to successful nation-building and democratic government. Observers of PNG politics, for example, have argued that its ethnic fragmentation represents a "formidable and intractable" impediment to nation-building (Premdas 1989, 246); and that PNG's "10,000 micro-societies" and 800 language groups, the largest of which numbers only 150,000 people, presents an almost insurmountable barrier to stable democracy (Griffin 1974, 142-43).

The historical record to date, however, does not support this conventional wisdom. While PNG has experienced a number of secessionist movements (including a long-running civil war on the eastern island of Bougainville), it has so far been able to maintain both its territorial unity and an impressive record of competitive democracy.<sup>1</sup> As we have seen, on most indicators of democratic consolidation PNG ranks as one of the best-established democracies in the developing world. Despite being faced with difficulties similar to those of many newly-independent African states (e.g. ethnic divisions, tribal conflict, economic underdevelopment, low literacy and educational levels) democratic procedures have not just survived in PNG but, on many indicators, appear to have flourished. Freely contested and highly competitive elections have occurred regularly since 1964. Participation has been inclusive. Civil and political liberties have generally remained unrestricted, as have the media and labour unions. Voter turnout has been consistently high. There is thus some justification for Larry Diamond's assessment that PNG's "remarkably vibrant and resilient democratic system" makes it, with India, the most successful democracy of any of the 'Asian' developing countries (1989, 1), and for David Lipset's similar conclusion that "the democratic system in PNG has been highly successful in terms of ... any comparative scale" (1989, 409). As Saffu notes, in terms of uncertainty of electoral outcomes and

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<sup>1</sup> See Premdas 1977.

the extent of contestation and participation for office, “PNG must be counted as one of the most democratic states in the world” (1996, 1).

Crucially, there has been a genuine contest for political power at each post-independence election, and PNG thus stands in stark contrast to a number of other developing countries which also have reasonably competitive elections but have yet to experience a change of government (Malaysia and Botswana both fall into this category). In contrast to these ‘dominant-party systems’, peaceful changes of government in PNG have been common. In the post-independence period alone, to 1997 there had been eight changes of government: once at independence, three times at general elections and four times on the floor of parliament. The success of democracy in PNG is thus at least partly explicable by reference to Prezworski’s description of democracy as “organized uncertainty”, whereby winners in one election become losers in the next, and where all outcomes are necessarily temporary and uncertain (1991, 13).

PNG’s democratic sustainability also represents a deviant case for students of political institutions. PNG’s electoral institutions are highly ‘majoritarian’, despite the prevailing viewpoint amongst scholars that proportional representation is required for ethnically-fragmented societies and that “plurality and majority methods will work less successfully in deeply divided or plural societies than in homogeneous ones” (Bogdanor 1987, 195). For its three pre-independence elections, PNG used a majority electoral system — the alternative vote, inherited from Australia. This was changed to a plurality or first-past-the-post (FPTP) system at independence in 1975. PNG’s wider institutions of government are also highly majoritarian, featuring a Westminster-style parliament and, more recently, a shift from the quasi-federal structure established at independence towards a unitary state.<sup>2</sup> The National Parliament is a unicameral body, in which the executive is formed by and responsible to the legislature. There is a separate independent judiciary. The head of state is the British monarch, represented locally by a governor-general. The prime ministership is determined by a vote on the floor of the parliament. Parliament is effectively sovereign: the Constitution can be amended by two successive ‘super-majority’ votes of parliament, not by referendum. These features

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<sup>2</sup> For the most influential example of this typology see Lijphart’s *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries* (1984). As the title suggests, Lijphart seeks to demonstrate a basic division in established democracies between those utilising majoritarian political institutions (such as majority electoral laws and single-party governments) and those which place constraints on majority rule via proportional representation, coalitions and other ‘consensual’ devices.

were all introduced in PNG's 'autochthonous' 1975 Constitution, following an exhaustive consultative tour throughout Papua New Guinea by the body charged with drawing up an independence constitution for PNG, the Constitutional Planning Committee (hereafter CPC). Between 1972 and 1974, members of the Committee engaged in widespread consultations concerning the nature of an independent government in PNG which involved over 100 local meetings attended by an estimated 60,000 local people (CPC 1974, 1/1). The Constitution's autochthony was underlined by the decision of the national parliament to reconvene itself as a constituent assembly in order to debate and then formally adopt the Constitution in 1975.

The CPC's final report avoided discussion of alternatives to what was, for colonial PNG, a familiar Westminster-style system of parliamentary government (1974, 6/1), despite some observers arguing that PNG "may not be suitable soil to plant the seed of Westminster" (Waddell 1973, 30). In this it followed trends elsewhere in the 'decolonisation decades' of the 1960s and early 1970s. As Madden has shown, the indigenous elite in British colonies almost invariably opted for the Westminster model at independence, despite consistent misgivings from the imperial parliament that it was "of doubtful value as an export to tropical colonies, to primitive societies in Africa and to complex societies in India" (1980, 20). Often, the presumption appears to have been that by adopting the formal institutions of Westminster, a British-style system of two strong parties alternating in power would follow. In PNG as in most other developing countries, such presumptions proved to be deeply mistaken.

Despite the 'home grown' process which led to the drafting of the Constitution, PNG's basic institutions of government thus represent a familiar example of a Westminster parliamentary system, and in terms of political institutions PNG must rate as one of the purer and more majoritarian examples of the Westminster system in the world today.<sup>3</sup> There is a widespread scholarly consensus that such centralised, majoritarian institutions are inappropriate and dangerous for plural societies.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, many scholars argue that modern representative democracy demands meaningful and effective political parties, yet PNG has a party system that is weak, fragmented and increasingly

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<sup>3</sup> See Lijphart 1984, 1-20.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Lewis 1965; Lijphart 1977, 1991d.

irrelevant.<sup>5</sup> As argued in the previous chapter, despite a weak and dissolute party system, majoritarian institutions of government, and an extremely high degree of ethnic fragmentation, on many indicators of democratic consolidation PNG is one of the best-established democracies in the developing world. In this sense, PNG boasts a successful democratic record which represents a significant deviant case for students of democracy and comparative politics. How do we explain this apparent conundrum?

This chapter suggests that the reason for PNG's democratic success lies in a combination of favourable structural, social and historical factors. Foremost among these is the sheer diversity of PNG's ethnic structure, which virtually guarantees that no one group will ever be able to single-handedly gain control of political power. Social organisational factors — particularly the competitive and often egalitarian nature of traditional society exemplified by the 'big-man' model of leadership — are also adjudged to be an advantage. In addition, the Australian colonial administration was, it is argued, relatively successful in inculcating a respect for constitutionalism and willingness to play by the 'rules of the game' amongst PNG's indigenous elite. By contrast, a serious weakness for democratic consolidation is posed by the increasing weakness of the PNG party system, and particularly the failure of PNG parties to penetrate to any meaningful level into PNG society, or to develop the necessary coherence to act as disciplined parliamentary machines. The combination of PNG's weak party system with its robust history of competitive democracy also represents a challenge to the conventional wisdom concerning the relationship between a well-developed party system and democratic sustainability.

### **Democracy and ethnic conflict in PNG**

Ethnically-divided states can be structured in very different ways, and the PNG case represents a situation in which a large number of ethnic groups are included within the state "with no single group dominant" (May 1996a, 10). Ethnic groups in PNG are "both small and multiple" (Regan 1995, 9). With no common history of statehood, "its people are fragmented into hundreds of often mutually antipathetic ethnic groupings" (Hegarty 1979, 188). At the latest count there were approximately 840 distinct languages spoken in PNG, around a quarter of the world's stock, reflecting enormous

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<sup>5</sup> See Strom 1995a, 933.

cultural divisions: “in a very real sense the country is a nation of minorities” (Minority Rights Group 1997, 682). Deklin writes that “PNG is a land of many cultures and, if we take the number of languages in the country as a rough criterion, there are some 1,000 cultures” (1992, 35).

Defining what constitutes an ‘ethnic group’ in PNG is no easy task. According to Lijphart, an ethnic group can be defined as a group of people who see themselves as a distinct cultural community, often sharing a “common language, religion, kinship, and/or physical characteristics (such as skin colour); and who tend to harbour negative and hostile feelings towards members of other groups” (Lijphart 1995b, 853). This is quite a broad definition of ethnicity, including as it does reference to factors such as race and religion. Esman has contrasted this to a ‘narrower definition’ of ethnic identity which denotes a community that claims common origins, possesses distinctive and valued cultural markers such as customs, dress and, especially, language, and that expects to share a common destiny (Esman 1994, 15). This narrower definition may be more applicable to PNG, where groups are divided less on overt ascriptive criteria such as race or religion than on kinship, custom, language and region. Levine writes that

if ethnic communities are understood to be groups possessing a distinctive language, custom and memories — traits that give its members a sense of unity and cause them to distinguish themselves (and be distinguished by) others — then PNG may have more than one thousand such ethnic groups within its borders (1997, 479).

Part of the difficulty of defining what constitutes an ethnic group in PNG is the sheer variation of its ethnic structure, which limits the ability to make generalisations. For example, in lowlands areas the population of ethno-linguistic units normally ranges from a few hundred to four or five thousand, whereas in the highlands these groups may number up to 60,000 members (de Lepervanche 1973, 1065). In the highlands regions the largest autonomous groups have tended to be defined in the scholarly literature as ‘tribes’, ‘phratries’, or ‘clans’; in coastal areas the literature more often refers to ‘villages’, ‘territories’, ‘neighbourhoods’ or similar terms (Langness 1973, 924). For the purposes of this thesis, an ‘ethnic group’ constitutes any of these larger or smaller cultural-linguistic groupings which tend to *act collectively for political purposes*, such as voting in elections. My concern here is not to overly generalise about PNG’s extremely complex social structure, but rather to provide a common unit of analysis across all the cases cited in this thesis. This definition of ‘ethnic group’ draws on my

earlier definition of a divided society: that is, a society in which ethnicity is a politically salient cleavage and in which ethnic groups act collectively for political purposes.

### *Ethnic structure in PNG*

PNG exhibits one of the most ethnically fragmented social structures known in the world today. At the root of this social structure are unilateral descent groups usually described as ‘clans’ — ascriptive extended family networks which are the primary, and sometimes the only, unit of political and social loyalty in many areas.<sup>6</sup> Considering the lack of overt racial distinction between them, the depth of cleavages between groups is often striking, and can be partly explained by two related factors: geography and language. PNG has some of the world’s most dramatic terrain, with a vast range of mountains and valleys running through the middle of the mainland and an extensive arc of populated volcanic islands off the coast — all of which create severe difficulties in terms of isolation, access and transport. Accordingly, “most groups developed their own physical and cultural identity in isolation ... communities living on different sides of the same highland valley sometimes speak languages as distinct from one another as Spanish is from Italian” (Souter 1963, 49). While few groups were entirely isolated, and many had ‘ally’ groups with which they conducted trade and marriage, relations between many were characterised as much by hostility as by co-operation. Traditional contact in the highlands, for example, often took the form of intermittent tribal warfare between clan groups.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, within the main language groups themselves, there are also often deep and bitter internal divisions.<sup>8</sup>

There has been little detailed assessment of the total number of ethnic groups in PNG, but estimates from informed observers are in the region of 5000-7000 separate groups.<sup>9</sup> This means that PNG is probably the world’s most heterogeneous society in terms of the number of distinct polities (which continue to be based, overwhelmingly, on ascriptive ethnic identities), with estimates of the number of separate ‘political units’ ranging from 2000 to 18000.<sup>10</sup> If a larger unit of base measurement is used, such as ‘tribes’ (i.e.

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<sup>6</sup> See Hogbin 1973, 23.

<sup>7</sup> See Reay 1982, 630-36.

<sup>8</sup> See de Lepervanche 1973, 1066.

<sup>9</sup> Personal communication, Dr Bill Standish, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 28 September 1996.

<sup>10</sup> Personal communication, Dr John Burton, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 24 December 1996.

aligned or related clan groupings), then we are still dealing with an extremely fragmented society: a rough average of 2000 members per tribe against PNG's total population of approximately 4 million people gives a figure of around 2000 separate tribes. Even using conservative figures, then, we are dealing with a level of fragmentation which makes divided societies elsewhere look relatively homogeneous by comparison.

The findings of a number of comparative, large-N research studies suggest that this degree of ethnic fragmentation has serious implications for a polity's democratic prospects. There is widespread agreement from cross-national studies of the effect of ethnic heterogeneity on political stability that as the number of ethnic groups in a state increases, the prospects for sustainable democracy decreases. Unfortunately, almost none of this substantial body of comparative political science research includes Papua New Guinea as a unit of analysis. One of the first such studies, Robert Dahl's *Polyarchies*, utilising data collected in the 1960s, concluded that although democracy in highly fragmented countries was not impossible, "a competitive political system is less likely in countries with a considerable measure of subcultural pluralism" (1971, 111). Rabushka and Shepsle found that one of the "striking regularities" amongst ethnically-fragmented societies was that "democracy frequently gives way to forms of authoritarian rule" (1972, 177-78). Similarly, Lijphart has argued in his work on consociational democracy, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, that the optimal number of segments for a consociationalist approach to ethnic conflict management to work is three or four, and conditions become progressively less favourable as segments increase, because co-operation among groups becomes more difficult as the number of groups increase (1977, 56). Using similar data on ethnic fragmentation, Lane and Ersson (1990, 138) also found a negative correlation between ethnic diversity and democratic persistence. They refined this finding in more recent research which found a "weak negative relationship" between ethnic fragmentation and factors such as state stability and civic and political rights, prompting the conclusion that ethnic fragmentation may be a contributory factor to state instability, but that it is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition (Lane and Ersson 1994, 149).

Probably the most sophisticated study to date of this issue has been Powell's *Contemporary Democracies: Participation, Stability, and Violence*. A cross-national



multivariate analysis of factors affecting democratic prospects utilising data from 29 democracies, Powell's study found that ethnic fractionalisation was positively related to executive instability. He also found a strong positive relationship between ethnic fractionalisation and death by violence, with majoritarian constitutional systems like PNG's experiencing more serious violence than other constitutional types (1982, 44-46, 221). This study is particularly relevant to PNG because, unlike most comparative analyses of democracies<sup>11</sup>, it includes developing countries such as Malaysia, Sri Lanka, India and Jamaica in its analysis — countries which, as Weiner noted, are comparable to PNG in terms of democratic success and which also face serious ethnic problems.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, PNG was not included in Powell's study.

Possibly the most substantive comparative evidence for PNG's unique combination of unfavourable socio-economic conditions with highly democratic processes comes from Tatu Vanhanen's *Prospects of Democracy*, which attempts to make predictions for the democratic success or failure of almost every country in the world based on each state's distribution of economic, land and intellectual resources. Vanhanen's statistical modelling found that PNG was the most extreme deviant case in his entire 172-country sample, with low resource distribution values combined with high indicators of democratic participation and competitiveness. Vanhanen's perplexed conclusion was that

Papua New Guinea has been a deviating democracy since its independence in 1975 ... The poverty of the population and a low level of higher education are unfavourable structural factors [but] Papua New Guinea's high level of democratization and low level of resource distribution show a discrepancy that cannot be explained away ... a partial failure of democratic institutions would not be surprising (1997, 152-53).

One possible explanation for PNG's 'deviance' in this regard concerns the difference between ethnic divisions in PNG that are mostly expressed at the local level — for example, in a contest to have a member of one's own clan or tribe elected in a constituency — and the contest for national hegemony that characterises ethnic conflict in other, less fragmented societies. As will be argued in more detail below, PNG's extreme ethnic fragmentation may actually increase prospects for sustainable democracy

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<sup>11</sup> For example, Lijphart 1984.

<sup>12</sup> The other comparable case from Weiner's list, Trinidad and Tobago, was omitted from Powell's study "for simple reasons of lack of data" (Powell 1982, 4).

by dispersing conflict and guaranteeing that no one group will be able to command power alone.

Some analysts have argued that group fragmentation actually helps democratic prospects. Crouch, for example, argues that democracy in states such as India and the Philippines is facilitated “by ethnic compositions which make it difficult for any single ethnic group to predominate, and therefore encourage the formation of multi-ethnic alliances” (1993, 83). In other cases of extreme group fragmentation, where “some groups are so small in size and so geographically concentrated ... it makes little sense for them to devote energy to political activity much beyond their locality” (Horowitz 1985, 37). Under this scenario,

states embrace a large number of dispersed ethnic groups, none of them large or powerful enough to threaten to dominate the center ... from the standpoint of ethnic conflict, however, much of the pressure is off the center. In dispersed systems, group loyalties are parochial, and ethnic conflict is localized ... In such circumstances, the center usually has some flexibility. The demands of one group can sometimes be granted without injuring the interests of others (Horowitz 1985, 37-38).

A further positive feature of democracy in such systems is that key agencies of the state, such as the police force and the military, tend to be composed in such an ethnically-heterogeneous way that no group interest can predominate internally, while centre-based civilian politics is itself so heterogeneous as to act in most cases as a relatively neutral agent on ethnic issues. Both of these factors have often been cited as contributing factors to PNG’s democratic longevity.<sup>13</sup> This suggests the possibility of a more complex relationship between ethnic fragmentation and democratic sustainability, with both very low (i.e. highly homogenous) and very high (i.e. highly heterogeneous) levels of ethnic fragmentation more conducive to democracy than those in-between.<sup>14</sup>

### *Ethnic identity in PNG*

Despite PNG’s extraordinary degree of ethnic fragmentation, which significantly distinguishes it from the more familiar cases of ‘bi-communal’ or majority/minority ethnic structure found in many regions, ethnic identity in PNG, as elsewhere, tends to be

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<sup>13</sup> See May 1993, 75.

<sup>14</sup> The findings also point to the need for a more nuanced distinction in the scholarly literature between those multiethnic societies in which ethnicity is *apolitically-salient* cleavage, such as India, Sri Lanka, Fiji or PNG, compared to multiethnic societies like the United States or Australia in which ethnic issues are, for the most part, relatively peripheral to the political process.

manifested as a mixture of 'primordial' and 'constructed' factors.<sup>15</sup> Under this typology, ethnic identity can be seen, on the one hand, as being based on ascriptive and relatively immutable factors (such as clan, tribe, racial or linguistic identity) — a position often characterised in the scholarly literature as 'primordialism' — and, on the other hand, as being a more malleable function of constructed social identities formed by colonialism and by post-colonial developments or operationalised by 'ethnic entrepreneurs'.<sup>16</sup> In reality, most examples of politicised ethnic identities exhibit a combination of both 'primordial' historical associations and 'instrumental' opportunistic adaptations (Esman 1994, 14). Many analyses of ethnicity in PNG, for example, emphasise the extent to which ethnic identities are both a salient feature of traditional society and also a reaction to colonialism, modernisation and independence.<sup>17</sup> Unsurprisingly, descriptions of 'traditional' ethnic identities in PNG tend to privilege primordial characteristics of ascription, competition and dynamism. Parker and Wolfers characterised the traditional situation in PNG as one in which

political entities ... were both relatively unstable and small. Not many effective political units contained more than a few hundred people, although on occasions thousands might co-operate for a specific battle, or in trade and ceremonial exchange. Membership of even the smallest primary groups was unstable — as people married in and out, disputes arose between rival leaders, and inter-group warfare forced some members of each group to choose between the claims to their loyalties of, say, their residential or their kin group (1971, 16).

Primordial factors remain strong at all levels of PNG politics. Political loyalties are focused primarily at the level of family, clan and regional allegiances, rather than along party or ideological lines. Standish notes that "most PNG people maintain a mind-set of primary attachment and loyalty to their clan and tribal group, sometimes known as *wantok*, the Tokpisin [i.e. Pidgin] word for people who speak the same language" (Standish 1994, 60). The importance of ethnicity in PNG political life is thus that it taps deep levels of socialisation, experience and culture, with the result that "instinctive loyalty, as well as considerations of personal and family security and of group sanctions, tie individuals to their ethnic community, especially under conditions of intergroup tension and conflict" (Esman 1994, 15).

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<sup>15</sup> The term primordialism is usually associated with Geertz 1963. For a discussion of this typology in the scholarly literature, see Esman 1994, 9-16.

<sup>16</sup> There is a considerable literature on ethnicity and ethnic identity. See Young 1976; Brass 1985; Rothschild 1981; Smith 1986; Horowitz 1985; Esman 1994.

<sup>17</sup> See Premdas 1989, 246.

Ethnic identity as a political factor in PNG tends to be played out at different levels, and may manifest itself as a salient factor, in varying strengths, at the levels of extended family, clan, tribe, region and even along the colonial divisions of the state between Papua and New Guinea (Parker and Wolfers 1971, 16-17). The strength of ethnic attachments is thus dependent to a significant extent upon social context. In PNG, as in other plural societies, nearly all persons are carriers of multiple ethnic identities, but with what Sevese Morea has called the “ethnic belly button” of village or *wantok* politics usually of foremost salience.<sup>18</sup> Demographically, PNG is also fragmented at several levels — at the clan, village and immediate region level, but also along the over-arching geographical axes of south coast (Papua), north coast (New Guinea), highlands and islands — and *wantok* identities often extend into these larger regional levels as well as the clan or village ones (Standish 1994, 60).

Despite this degree of variation, it is possible to make some limited generalised observations about ethnicity and politics in PNG. The most important of these, for the purposes of this thesis, concerns the way ethnic groups are mobilised for electoral purposes. Elections in PNG often have the effect of underlining the significance of basic, clan or village-level ethnic attachments. Premdas notes that

the general electoral pattern since the introduction of universal adult suffrage in 1964 and through subsequent elections ... has underscored unequivocally that ethnic identity, usually at the *ples tok* [i.e. village language] level, is the foremost determinant of voter preference (1989, 251).

Especially in the pre-independence elections which are of primary concern to this thesis, there appears to have been a high correlation between ethnic affiliation and voting behaviour. Thus Parker’s analysis of the 1968 election notes that most indigenous candidates “commanded a more or less automatic bloc vote. Its core was usually to be found in their own or their more notable relatives’ kinship or clan groups” (1971, 316). More recent elections, however, have illustrated the increasing importance of other factors — such as education and familiarity with the skills and occupational experience of the modern world — as influences upon voting choice. Saffu’s survey of electoral behaviour at the 1987 election, for example, found that the most significant explanatory variable of voter choice was the perceived leadership ability of the candidate, and their ability to get the job done and deliver development to the electorate, rather than their clan identity (1989, 30). Burton’s extensive analysis of voting patterns in the Hagen

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<sup>18</sup> See Premdas 1989, 247.

Open seat in 1987 found that although ethnic groups tended to give strong, and sometimes overwhelming, support to their 'home' candidate, it did not follow that the biggest group inevitably carried the day: perceptions of leadership qualities, social factors overriding clan loyalties, 'swinging' voters and the shifting allegiances of non-aligned blocks and clan groups all played their part (Burton 1989, 279).

These 'cross-cutting cleavages' are important for discussions of constitutional engineering in PNG, because they suggest that some electors, under some circumstances, will be prepared to vote for a member of a group different to their own even in situations of deep and enduring ethnic attachments. Similar findings will be evidenced by later studies of Fiji and Sri Lanka, both of which are examples of societies which face deep 'bi-polar' ethnic divisions, rather than the highly fragmented ethnic structure of PNG. But despite its structural differences, elections in PNG exhibit comparable types of politicised ethnicity to many other plural states — a combination of ascriptive ethnic political identities combined with countervailing, but usually less salient, 'cross-cutting' cleavages. In sum, even in recent elections, the salience of ethnic identity in PNG society means that parochial loyalties continue to be the primary, but not the only, basis for voter mobilisation.<sup>19</sup>

### *Ethnic conflict in PNG*

Most discussions of ethnic conflict and politics focus on the concept of political 'cleavage'. Used in this context, cleavage refers to the alignment of a population around particular social dimensions which are conducive to conflict between them.<sup>20</sup> In PNG, the nature of such cleavages tends to be manifested at several levels. The most important conflicts to date have been at the macro level, in terms of ethno-nationalist movements and secessionist struggles.<sup>21</sup> By far the most persistent and deadly of these has been the long-running civil war on Bougainville, which has claimed several thousand lives to date.<sup>22</sup> Most conflicts in PNG, however, are manifested not at the 'macro' ethno-nationalist level, but at the micro-level as violence between PNG's many small, competitive ethnic groups. The nature of ethnic conflict between these groups is

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<sup>19</sup> See Standish 1994, 60.

<sup>20</sup> See Rae and Taylor 1970.

<sup>21</sup> See Premdas 1977; May 1982.

<sup>22</sup> See Lawson 1993.

traditionally played out locally, often via inter-tribal fighting, rather than as part of an ethno-nationalist quest or a competition for regional or national hegemony, although it is no less deadly for that. Over 100 people are killed every year in tribal fights in PNG (Dorney 1990, 310). Reports have estimated that around 20 percent of the population is affected by such violence, with a marked concentration in highlands regions (Clifford, Morauta and Stuart 1984, 94-95). Recently, guns have supplanted more traditional weapons in tribal wars, thus raising their stakes and increasing their deadliness (Dorney 1990, 310-11). Barnes claims that “a characteristic of Highlands cultures, and perhaps of Melanesia as a whole, is the high value placed on violence”<sup>23</sup>, and it is notable that conflicts between clan groups in many parts of PNG are considerably more violent than relations between communities in such ‘deeply-divided’ states as Malaysia, Fiji, Trinidad and Tobago and many other plural societies.

The imposition of representative government via competitive national elections has tended to sharpen ethnic cleavages, as the salience of ethnicity in PNG “tends to come to the fore ... during national election campaigns” (Howard 1989, 45). It is thus perhaps not surprising that ethnic violence increases at election time (Strathern 1993, 51). Strathern has argued that post-independence elections in PNG have encouraged a ‘retribalisation’ of ethnic groups, in which the commodification of the voting process has led increasingly to rigidified ethnic group boundaries and inter-ethnic armed conflict (1993, 48). Elections are thus one of the primary ways in which traditional enmities are mobilised in contemporary PNG, even though in most cases contestation is very much for election to office itself, rather than larger concerns such as policy implementation, government formation or national ideology (Dinnen 1996; Standish 1996). Traditional clan, tribe and *wantok* affiliations remain for the most part ascriptive and competitive categories, sometimes violently so, and continue to represent the primary, but far from the only, explanation of voting behaviour. In this sense, the politicised nature of ethnic conflict in PNG via clan contests for electoral victory is comparable to the less fragmented cases of ethnic groups in conflict found in many other developing countries. This point is important for the analysis of electoral behaviour under different voting systems presented in later chapters.

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<sup>23</sup> As quoted in May 1982, 641.

## Democracy in PNG: facilitating factors

Many scholarly analyses focus on the democratic nature of many traditional social organisations as one of the most important contributing factors to PNG's democratic success: Lipset, for example, has argued that perhaps Australia's greatest contribution as a colonial power was that it allowed "the democratic features of traditional Melanesian politics" to become institutionalised within the postcolonial political environment (1989, 413). One official source has described democracy in the South Pacific as generally having "fairly shallow roots", but with better prospects in Melanesian countries like PNG "because of their traditional consensus approach to decision-making" (Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade 1989, 162). Deklin has similarly argued that the reason for PNG's democratic continuity lies in the "somewhat coincidental marriage" between PNG's traditional Melanesian culture and value system and the process of modern representative government (1992, 47). In opposition to this view, a number of indigenous elite commentators have argued that democratic systems based on the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy may not be suitable for Pacific island states such as PNG. According to these arguments, the 'Melanesian way' of consensual decision making is inconsistent with the adversarial style of Westminster politics; while traditional sources of authority (such as hereditary chiefs) and cultural mores can be at odds with the concepts of elected government, universal suffrage and constitutional guarantees of rights found in most Western political systems.<sup>24</sup>

Because of its brevity of contact with the outside world and the late introduction of democratic institutions by the colonial power, the citizens of PNG do not have the benefit of a well-established democratic heritage on which to draw. Contact with the developed West came to PNG extremely late by comparative terms: regular contact along PNG's coastal areas occurred only intermittently until well into the nineteenth century, while much of the more populous highlands region did not come into contact with the outside world until Jim Taylor and the Leahy brothers' venture to the Waghi Valley in 1933.<sup>25</sup> Despite this, PNG is one of the developing world's most successful democracies on indicators of consolidation, participation and competitiveness. The

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<sup>24</sup> For a discussion see Kotobalavu 1989, 29.

<sup>25</sup> For a history of these expeditions, see Souter 1963.

most important reason for PNG's continuing democratic success, I will argue below, is its extremely high degree of ethnic fragmentation — the same factor identified by comparative studies as being negatively associated with democratic persistence. PNG's deviance in this regard is so marked as to call into question a number of the findings linking ethnic fragmentation to democratic instability. Other reasons for PNG's ongoing democratic success noted in the introduction to this chapter are also discussed: traditional political structures which emphasise competition for leadership; reciprocal obligations and individualistic achievement; and the 'British model' of elite constitutional inculcation and rapid decolonisation performed by the departing Australian administration prior to independence in 1975.

### *Ethnic fragmentation*

At first glance, it seems perverse to assert that PNG's highly fragmented collection of tribes, clans and language groups should assist democratic persistence. Such an argument flies in the face of many academic analyses concerning the relationship between democratic sustainability and ethnic fragmentation discussed earlier. The key to the beneficial effects of ethnic fragmentation in PNG is its dispersive effects on ethnic conflict, which is typically expressed at the periphery (in the form of local-level disputes and tribal fighting) rather than at the centre (in the form of a contest for government by one or two dominant groups). This attribute was identified well before PNG became independent, when in 1970 the Kenyan scholar Ali Mazrui argued that

The worst troubles we have had in Africa have been in countries with very big tribes competing with each other ... To this extent, one of Papua New Guinea's greatest assets may well be its acute ethnic fragmentation. Small ethnic groups may fight each other, but because there are so many their conflicts may remain localised. They need not shake the nation to its very foundation, as did the tensions between big ethnic giants in Nigeria, the Congo, Kenya and Uganda (1970, 54-55).

The reality of PNG's extraordinary ethnic structure is that no group is ever likely to have sufficient support to attempt to control power at the national level, and the one ethno-regional numeric majority that could conceivably make such a claim — the highlanders, which make up close to half of PNG's population — are probably the most fragmented and divided of all regional groups in PNG. Attempts to mobilise ethno-regional forces in Papua, for example, where there is a relatively high degree of regional consciousness, have contributed to changes of government, but never to a level sufficient for Papuans to act as a hegemonic ethnic power. This is a major advantage so far as democratic prospects are concerned, as no group "is either subject to strong



pressure to take exclusive control of the state or capable of doing so if it wishes to” (Regan 1995, 9). While ‘ethnic entrepreneurs’ from the larger and more conspicuous ethno-regional groups make periodic attempts at mobilising support through appeals to ethnic consciousness (e.g. Josephine Abaijah’s Papua Besena separatist movement in the 1970s, or Iambakey Okuk’s similar attempts to harness some type of pan-highlander consciousness in the early 1980s), the fact is that no group to date has been able, nor seriously attempted, to stake a claim for national domination. And, while there has been a noticeable ethno-regional quality to some governing coalitions in recent parliaments, this also appears to rotate, with governments headed by a coastal New Guinean under Michael Somare and islanders under prime ministers Chan and Namaliu giving way to the supremacy of highlanders and Papuans under prime ministers Paias Wingti and Bill Skate respectively. With the major exception of the secessionist civil war on Bougainville, and some more minor historical incidents<sup>26</sup>, ethnic conflict in PNG is predominantly a local-level phenomenon, although no less serious or deadly because of that.

Just as the nature of ethnic cleavage in PNG is fragmented by its extraordinary level of clan-based diversity, so PNG does not suffer from the bi-polar linguistic divisions that have moulded political development in Canada, the Netherlands, Belgium and some African states. Like the question of racial fractionalisation, a multiplicity of languages at the micro-level has by necessity led to a degree of integration at the national level, with English as the language of official communication and Tokpisin the neutral *lingua franca* of the masses — largely replacing Hiri Motu, which was once the *lingua franca* of Papua. As Mazrui has argued, this process has been aided, not hindered, by PNG’s “incredible linguistic diversity” (1970, 55). In addition, the rise of Tokpisin as a national language has provided PNG with an integrative means of mutual communication, while the widespread use of English amongst the elite facilitates communication with the developed world — both necessary if not sufficient requirements for successful nation-building.

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<sup>26</sup> For example, the violence between ‘Papuans’ and ‘New Guineans’ following a Papua versus New Guinea rugby league match in Port Moresby in June 1968, which was later reported as “one of the worst outbreaks of inter-tribal fighting to occur” in Port Moresby, although in reality it demonstrated how arbitrary and introduced loyalties can be used in much the same way as traditional divisions to structure difference and conflict. See Nelson 1974, 26.

### *Traditional leadership structures*

Traditional sources of authority in PNG have been viewed by many scholars as being essentially egalitarian and consensual, and thus amenable to the concept of a competitive meritocracy embodied in modern representative democracy. In fact, the combination of traditional consultative and communal decision-making with widely-distributed traditions of social fluidity are often cited as the main reasons for the successful marriage between traditional culture and modern representative democracy in PNG.<sup>27</sup> Griffin has argued that PNG's "dearth of durable forms of wealth helped to ensure that society would be egalitarian rather than hierarchical in structure" (1974, 142-43). Excepting a few societies which possessed hereditary chieftaincies, leadership was typically by 'big-men', who achieved their status through competition, and community decision making was predominantly consensual (May 1997, 1). The village or tribal authority exercised by a 'big-man' was acquired and maintained through a two-way system of patronage and exchange with their followers. Big-men positions were rarely gained by hereditary right but usually through prowess in battle, skills in public debate and the accumulation and distribution of wealth.<sup>28</sup> As Standish notes, the "core of the 'big-man' theory is the open nature of the competition for leadership, which is achieved on merit rather than ascription ... The 'Big-man' model stresses accommodation within the group" (Standish 1978, 33-34).

In addition, the type of qualities expected of the traditional big man — including oratorical skills, ability to mobilise and organise supporters and the capacity to both accumulate and distribute resources — are some of the key skills needed to be a successful parliamentarian in most modern democracies, including PNG. Past electoral studies have pointed out how the "counterpoint between traditional and modern bases for status-competition" (Strathern 1976, 283) defines elections in many parts of PNG, with the result that there is a strong two-way incentive for a rational candidate seeking election to build up his ceremonial exchange links and for others to invest in him. Elections thus provide an arena in which traditional rivalries can be fought out. Traditional political leadership was closely linked to the active day-to-day control, acquisition and ceremonial disposal of community wealth (Bettison, Hughes and van

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<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Deklin 1992, 35-48.

<sup>28</sup> See Morauta 1984, 9.

der Veur 1965, 3). Many accounts of recent elections serve to underline just how similar the current expectation of leadership duties is to this traditional role in many areas.<sup>29</sup> While not directly analogous, the traditional 'big-man' leadership structure is thus surprisingly amenable to the concept of modern political representation via parliamentary democracy.

Big-man leadership structures in Melanesian countries like PNG are often contrasted to the chiefly systems which predominate in Polynesia, where leadership is inherited and franchises are often limited to traditional nobles or chiefs: hence the argument that democracy has deeper roots and better prospects in Melanesia.<sup>30</sup> In recent years, however, there has been some re-evaluation of this argument as increasing evidence has come to light of the role of chiefly status and hereditary advantage in many areas of PNG.<sup>31</sup> The key factor seems to be that a mixture of 'hereditary' and 'big-man' models often co-existed. It appears that a big-man's children, for example, clearly had better prospects than their peers of becoming 'big-men' themselves. But although it is clear that forms of hereditary succession do occur in many parts of PNG, particularly in some of the islands and lowlands areas, it is also clear that these tend to be coexist with elements of the big-man model.<sup>32</sup> In other words, even in the relatively rare cases of clear hereditary assumption of office in traditional PNG society, elements of the big-man model often remain. Social leadership structures based on a 'big-man' model are, by definition, dynamic: as a new leader rises, so an old leader is displaced. PNG has now enjoyed over 30 years of competitive elections — elections in which, in conspicuous contrast to many other comparable states, governments have changed both on the floor of parliament and at elections, and more parliamentarians are thrown out of office at each election than are re-elected. While this degree of incumbent turnover has a number of very real drawbacks (these will be examined in detail in the following chapter) it also provides the elements of dynamism and competition for office which lie at the heart of modern electoral democracy — and is the antithesis of the authoritarian forms of government which have taken hold in many new states in the developing world.

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Standish 1989, 164, 191.

<sup>30</sup> First put by Sahlins 1963.

<sup>31</sup> Summarised in May 1997.

<sup>32</sup> See Standish 1978.

Finally, just as PNG traditional society appears to have adapted relatively easily to the procedures of modern representative democracy, so democracy has necessarily been adapted to suit the needs of PNG's aspiring political elite. Because no group is capable of fully capturing or subverting the state to serve their own ends, the most rational strategy for aspiring leaders has been to gain access to the state — which, in the circumstances of the PNG economy, is itself by far the most effective way to access wealth — by constitutional means. In electoral terms in PNG, this means first accumulating personal wealth, and then distributing this wealth to one's supporter base so as to solidify one's position in power and the wealth associated with it. In this sense, the apparent constitutionalism of elites in PNG may be less a genuine commitment to democratic values than a rational strategy for gaining and maintaining power. However, the fact remains that the electoral arena is almost universally accepted as the appropriate and legitimate route to power — suggesting a clear commitment to the procedures, if not the values, of liberal democracy.<sup>33</sup>

### *Constitutionalism and decolonisation*

The scramble by Western powers to decolonise the Pacific Islands had, in many ways, as great an impact as the scramble to colonise a century or so earlier.<sup>34</sup> In some ways, the nature and timing of PNG's somewhat hasty decolonisation and independence can be seen as assisting its progress towards democracy. PNG did not attain internal self-government until December 1973, and independence was not attained until 1975. Coming near the end of a worldwide era of decolonisation that had begun almost thirty years before, this relatively late start meant that the nation's new leaders had the opportunity to observe the successes and failures of decolonisation elsewhere, and to learn from the experience of other post-independence countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific. The experience of democratic failure in the new African states was particularly timely: scholarly justifications, for example, for a 'one party system' in PNG, which were relatively common in the period immediately prior to independence, quickly lost their appeal.<sup>35</sup> Other lessons were similarly well-taken and given effect in the Constitution or soon after independence: the military was placed under civilian control,

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<sup>33</sup> See Regan 1995, 9-11.

<sup>34</sup> For a general overview see Davidson 1971.

<sup>35</sup> For a discussion of arguments supporting a 'one-party system' in PNG, see Premdas and Steeves 1983, 18-20.

the role of the opposition was recognised, government was decentralised and attempts were made to involve all backbenchers in the legislative process through an extended frontbench and a committee system. While some of these exercises have been less than successful in terms of efficient government (e.g. the establishment of provincial governments as part of the attempts at decentralisation), they have almost certainly contributed to PNG's relative success compared to most new democracies.

Signs of a shift in Australian policy towards self-government in PNG started to become apparent around the time of Harold Macmillan's famous 'winds of change' speech to the South African parliament in 1960, which signalled a speeding up of Britain's decolonisation program. While in the early 1960s most of the Australian administration "seemed to conceive of the political development of Papua New Guinea as essentially an educative process" (Loveday and Wolfers 1976, 4), with thoughts of self-government still many decades away, international observers and a small but influential number of Papua New Guineans saw indefinite extension of colonial rule as misguided and unacceptable. In 1962, a United Nations Visiting Mission led by Sir Hugh Foot recommended that a 100-member elected parliament should be established in PNG before 1964 (Thompson 1996, 167). The Australian administration, partly in response to the Foot Report, as it was known, in 1964 established a 64-member House of Assembly, 54 of whom were directly elected. In his speech to the Australian parliament on the introduction of the *Papua and New Guinea Bill 1963*, which provided for mass suffrage elections for the new Assembly, Hasluck made it clear that he saw PNG's political development in the same terms as that of the original Australian colonies: that is, a gradual historical progression towards constitutional government, extension of the franchise, and ultimately a fully independent parliamentary democracy (House of Representatives 1963, *passim*).

In reality, the actual progression to independence in PNG was more akin to a rush to the finish line of independence rather than a gradual and measured process of constitutional and political development. While later UN missions criticised the relatively slow pace of PNG's move towards self-government (Loveday and Wolfers 1976, 4), increasing nationalist and independence-oriented political movements in various parts of the country meant that the Australian administration ultimately departed with considerably more haste than was earlier anticipated — although primarily in response to what it saw

as its own interests. Thus, whereas in Australia the process of 'nation building' and the struggle for political power and sovereignty led to the formation of representative institutions and popular suffrage over a fifty year period in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in PNG the situation was reversed: parliamentary democracy and mass suffrage elections were seen by the Australian government as the *beginning* of the nation building process, and the total period from the first elections to the attainment of independence was a mere 11 years. Even this short period did, however, serve to introduce and begin to inculcate the values and practices of competitive democracy to large sections of the indigenous population, thereby broadening understanding and acceptance of the electoral process. Emerging elites in particular had already been co-opted, to a large extent, into embracing the democratic process as the legitimate and acceptable means for accessing political power. This stands in sharp contrast to the decolonisation process which took place in many failed democracies in Asia and Africa, where the sudden introduction of an often poorly-understood model of elected democracy almost guaranteed its subsequent failure.<sup>36</sup>

While decolonisation came late, forms of representative government came somewhat earlier to PNG. Local government councils were established under the active initiative of the Minister for Territories, Paul Hasluck, during the 1950s. By 1960 they covered approximately one-third of the country, and Hasluck considered they had provided PNG's indigenous population with enough experience to elect a number of their countrymen to the Territory's (largely appointed) Legislative Council, which had featured only three nominated local members since 1951 (Thompson 1996, 167). The final Legislative Council which met in April 1961 had nine elected and three nominated nationals in its total of 37 members. Elected representative democracy in PNG began in 1964, with the mass suffrage election of the first House of Assembly to replace a largely non-elected Legislative Council. The magnitude of the change involved was alluded to at the opening of the fifth (and final) Legislative Council by the Territory's Administrator, Sir Dallas Brooks:

At this meeting of the Council the people of the Territory cross the threshold of a new political life. The Australian Parliament, in enacting the constitutional reform which led to the changes in this Council, had it clearly in mind that there should be continuous political growth and progressive constitutional change. It is their belief that political growth and constitutional change should go hand in hand so that the political advancement of the people is never hampered by

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<sup>36</sup> Similar arguments have been mounted to explain Botswana's democratic success in comparison to the rest of Africa. See Holm 1987, 143-45.

having to work through institutions which have become out of date and unsuitable; and so that the institutions themselves will never fail to serve their purpose through any lack of political capacity among those who use them (Hasluck 1976, 394-95).

While the speech was delivered by Brooks, it had been drafted by Hasluck, who noted in his memoirs that although he was “not in the least doctrinaire on questions of political theory” he did confess “to being somewhat doctrinaire on questions of political institutions” (Hasluck 1976, 395). By this he appears to have meant that there was no question of anything other than a Westminster model of parliamentary representation being considered for the new House of Assembly, and that within this context Australia’s governmental institutions would be transplanted, where appropriate, to the Territory. The Territory’s former Deputy Administrator, Sir John Gunther, summed up the rationale thus:

I never had any reservations about it; I was sure it was the right thing to do. Now I could use two arguments. One is that we introduced what we knew about. I think in these kinds of situations where you’re moving rapidly towards independence, experimentation might be dangerous. So you implant what you know rather than try and find something different. Number two is that we never proposed that anything we did should be everlasting. We always said, ‘Look, the day after they get independence they can repeal, amend, do anything they like. But we’re giving them something we know about, it mightn’t work for them, but it does work for us, and we think it can work for them. So we’ll use it (quoted in Nelson 1982, 217-18).

On the eve of self-government, the new Minister for External Territories, Andrew Peacock, expressed similar sentiments, saying “naturally, my preference would be for the form of government I espouse myself and the government of Australia and the Territory here has developed” (Waddell 1973, 27). He also said that, unless there was a strong reaction against it, “future constitutional development would be aimed at furthering the establishment of a Westminster-type system” (Waddell 1973, 27). Five years earlier, in 1968, the Public Relations Advisory Committee of the Australian administration in PNG had introduced a political education program to “instruct people in the theory of Westminster government and its practice as applied in Papua New Guinea” which was specifically instructed to avoid discussing any political systems other than Westminster (May 1976, 33) — even though the Australian version (with a written constitution, federalism, and a powerful elected upper house) owes as much to Washington as Westminster.<sup>37</sup> May found that the program was notable for an “excessive emphasis” on the formal elements of the Westminster system, rather than on the more general questions of political activity and participation (May 1976, 35), while

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<sup>37</sup> See Thompson 1980.

Parker argued that the successful transplanting of the Westminster system was one of “four overt aims” of Australian policy in PNG (1971, 348). Following the 1972 elections, the forms of the House of Assembly increasingly resembled a genuinely sovereign parliament, with the Westminster format of government and opposition being institutionalised by the appointment of Matthias ToLimán as leader of the opposition to Michael Somare’s National Coalition government (Waddell 1973, 28fn).

### *The ‘British model’ of constitutional inculcation*

The way the institutions of elected parliamentary government were developed was also of great importance to the consolidation of democracy in PNG. In Weiner’s study of elections in developing countries cited earlier, the six successful developing-world democracies (PNG, India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago) were assessed as having little close relationship on almost any social or economic indicator, but “one common feature ... all are former British colonies” (1987, 19). While PNG’s major colonial influence came from Australia (itself an artefact of British colonialism), the significance of Weiner’s argument is based on the common democratic heritage afforded to many former members of the British Empire as part of the ‘British model’ of democratic tutelage and decolonisation, a model followed in form — and largely in function — by the Australian government in relation to PNG. Weiner’s conclusion about the importance of British colonialism has been reinforced by S.M. Lipset, who has found that past experience with British rule emerges as one of the most powerful correlates of democracy in the developing world (1996, 153).

The ‘British model’ (and the Australian model) of democratisation and decolonisation was typified by two basic components: the creation of bureaucratic structures which stressed the legitimate role of state authority (e.g. the police and the judiciary; functions exercised in colonial PNG largely the Australian patrol officers known as *kiaps*); and the establishment and institutionalisation of the principles of representative democracy and free and fair elections. By institutionalising rules and procedures as a starting point for democratic politics, and by emphasising the primacy of the rule of law and constitutionalism as guiding and binding forces upon political competition, the ‘British model’ created a well-defined arena for political competition *before* such competition was effectively unleashed in the form of mass suffrage elections and full indigenous participation in politics. Eckstein has argued that this process of building consent and



commitment to democratic principles is the crucial element in making democracies work. The British, he maintains, “invest with very high affect the procedural aspects of their government and with very low affect its substantive aspects ... Procedures, to them, are not merely procedures, but sacred rituals” (quoted in Weiner 1987, 14).

This commitment to procedures is more significant than it perhaps first appears. Weiner argues that the tradition of imposing limits on government, establishing norms for the conduct of those in power and creating procedures for the management of conflict has been hugely influential in the establishment and consolidation of democracy in developing countries (1987, 20). He concludes that the ‘British model’ of tutelary democracy is the single most effective colonial model of democratisation, due to its creation of centralising institutions that can gradually be made indigenous, and the establishment of democratic institutions and free and fair elections. This institutionalisation of political conflict into an adversarial system of political competition bounded by established rules leads to an acceptance of these rules and procedures amongst members of the political elite. In this way, the institutional framework for democracy “helps create the conditions of its own persistence” by enabling the emergence of classes which have an interest in the maintenance of these institutions, and by nurturing popular attitudes supportive of democratic procedures (Weiner 1987, 32).

Regan has described constitutionalism in PNG as being characterised by an acceptance amongst elites that the constitution is the appropriate instrument for managing political secession and mediating elite competition (Regan 1995, 10). A number of incidents have demonstrated the success of this acceptance of the legitimacy of the constitutional arena, and of what Saffu typifies as the “strong hold” of constitutionalism on PNG’s political actors (1985, 531). On 11 March 1980, Michael Somare’s government, which had been in power since the introduction of self-government in 1973, was defeated on the floor of parliament by a vote of no-confidence. This was the first time that PNG’s governing elite had faced the prospect of an alternation of power under the rules of a parliamentary system. To the surprise of some observers, Somare immediately stepped aside and transferred the prime ministership in a peaceful and orderly manner to the sponsor of the no-confidence motion (and Somare’s former deputy of two years earlier), Julius Chan. This first transfer of executive authority can be seen as a testament to the

success of the Australian government's attempts to emulate the British model of decolonisation by instilling a commitment to constitutionalism and democratic process.

A series of other potential crises has also been handled within the boundaries of the constitutional 'rules of the game'. In 1991 the governor-general, Sir Serei Eri, refused to follow constitutionally-binding advice to dismiss the deputy prime minister, Ted Diro, after the release of adverse findings against Diro by a leadership tribunal inquiry into corruption. Instead, Eri defused this potential crisis by resigning from office, to be replaced by a new governor-general who had no hesitation in sacking Diro. More recently, in September 1993, the then prime minister, Paias Wingti, organised a constitutionally questionable parliamentary manoeuvre: a surprise resignation and immediate parliamentary re-election after 14 months in office in order to circumvent a constitutional provision permitting votes of no-confidence after 18 months in office, thus gaining another 18 months of valuable governing time. In August 1994, Wingti's own appointment as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court led a full bench of seven judges who all ruled that the resignation was valid but that the constitutional requirements of the re-election had not been met, thus forcing a new election by the parliament which enabled Wingti's former deputy, Sir Julius Chan, to return to the prime ministership. Again, these transfers of power were conducted in an orderly fashion, and Wingti accepted the Court's decision. The acceptance of these and other rulings by political actors are themselves a persuasive example of the resilience of PNG's constitutional structures.

The most serious threat to the existence of constitutional government to date was the military insurrection in March 1997 against the Chan government's decision to hire foreign mercenaries to assist the government in its ongoing secessionist war on Bougainville (Dinnen, May and Regan 1997). This revolt was led by the commander of the Defence Force, Brigadier-General Jerry Singirok, who stopped well short of a full-scale attempted coup but who nonetheless was able to mobilise sufficient numbers of the armed forces to make his call for the resignation of Prime Minister Chan a serious threat to parliamentary democracy. While the army's push for Chan's resignation and pressure on the government to drop their contract with the mercenaries was clearly contrary to the spirit of the Constitution, they were equally concerned that their actions were seen as having a constitutional basis. Army leaders consistently advanced the

rhetoric of constitutionalism to justify their extraordinary actions. Singirok, for example, claimed that “We’ve allowed the democratic process to take place ... I was exercising my constitutional rights as a Papua New Guinea citizen”. His ally, Major Walter Enuma, asserted that the army was actually exercising its constitutional obligation to intervene in the crisis: “we fought against corruption, but the Constitution of the country must be upheld” (‘Army says it will now take a back seat’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 March 1997). Moreover, and more importantly, the crisis was settled by constitutional means, with Chan stepping aside from the prime ministership pending an inquiry into the hiring of the mercenaries, and an acting prime minister, John Giheno, taking his place until Chan’s return just prior to the 1997 national elections. At the 1997 election, Chan and another former prime minister, Paias Wingti, both lost their seats, along with most of Chan’s cabinet.

### **Political parties in PNG**

While PNG stands as a relatively rare example of democratic longevity in the developing world, its party system appears to be heading in the other direction, towards fragmentation and ultimately, perhaps, dissolution. The PNG party system is unstable (no government since independence has survived as elected for a full parliamentary term), fragmented (there were 20 registered parties prior to the 1997 election), highly personalised (parties tend to operate as parliamentary factions, based on one or two dominant personalities, rather than as coherent, broad-based vehicles for translating public preferences into government policy) and increasingly irrelevant (the largest ‘party’ at each of the last two elections has been independents, who have won over 50 percent of the vote on each occasion).

Rabushka and Shepsle have argued that this type of weak party system is typical of ethnically-fragmented societies, which are characterised both by the presence of many groups and the inability of any of them to dominate the political process. In post-colonial situations, where the rewards of political success become a valuable prize, parties proliferate but multi-party coalitions become difficult to form and hold together: “effective party politics ... does not usually emerge in the fragmented setting; no party is large enough to rule and the multiplicity of culture groups frustrates any attempts to form long-run multiethnic coalitions” (1972, 178). But the PNG case does not support

their conclusion that the absence of effective brokerage institutions such as political parties leads, in such cases, to the breakdown of democracy. In fact, the comparative literature appears to be largely silent on how to interpret instances where continuous democracy seems to coincide with the *lack* of a meaningful party system, such as appears to be the case in PNG.

Many political scientists appear to view a meaningful party system as a *sine qua non* of representative government, and often identify a functioning party system with democracy itself (Strom 1995b, 924). Strong party systems, some contend, are both reflections of and indispensable prerequisites for “good democratic performance” (Powell 1982, 74). Diamond sums up the prevailing view of many scholars, arguing that

one of the most important institutional arenas for democracy is the party system ... political parties remain important if not essential instruments for representing political constituencies and interests, aggregating demands and preferences, recruiting and socializing new candidates for office, organizing the electoral competition for power, crafting policy alternatives, setting the policy-making agenda, forming effective governments, and integrating groups and individuals into the democratic process (1997, xxiii).

Despite its democratic longevity, parties in PNG provide few, if any, of these aggregative and policy-related functions. Increasingly, PNG’s political parties appear to be little more than parliamentary factions. The scholarly literature suggests that this should present significant problems for the consolidation of democracy in PNG. As Powell notes, “virtually no party theorists favor fractionalized parties not linked to social groups. Multiple parties that represent only elite factions and personal followings receive few favourable reviews” (Powell 1982, 76-77). Huntington similarly argues that a key function of political parties is to present clear choices to voters and to link them closely to the political process; fractionalised and personalised systems which fail to do this are extremely damaging for democratic prospects and are, consequently, found widely in the failed democracies of the Third World (1968, chap. 7).

The empirical evidence appears to confirm these theoretical expectations. Reviewing the findings of their 26-nation study of democracy in developing countries, Diamond, Linz and Lipset found that their cases generally supported the proposition that “a system of two or a few parties, with broad social and ideological bases, may be conducive to stable democracy” (Diamond, Linz and Lipset 1995, 35). Papua New Guinea, however, proved to be an exception to this generalisation. Of the five developing-world cases

classified as 'stable democracies', two (Venezuela and Costa Rica) featured two-party systems, two (India and Botswana) exhibited one-party dominant systems, and only one (PNG) had a multiparty system.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, Power and Gasiorowski's comparative examination of democratic consolidation found that Papua New Guinea was the developing world's *only* consolidated parliamentary democracy which featured a multiparty system, defined as three or more parliamentary parties (1997, 144).<sup>39</sup> Again, the evidence from PNG appears to be a deviant case for comparative politics specialists, and a challenge to the prevailing wisdom. How do we explain this apparent conundrum?

### *The PNG party system*

Like most other modern institutions in PNG, political parties are very recent phenomena. The oldest party, the Pangu Pati, was formed in 1967 and headed by the country's first prime minister, Michael Somare. It attracted a group of young indigenous candidates and supporters and pushed the Australian government to increase the speed of decolonisation. A rival grouping formed as a counterbalance to Pangu and to their pressure for immediate self-government, the United Party, was supported mainly by highlanders and expatriate plantation owners. Since independence, parties have come and gone with increasing regularity, with three major parties participating in most coalition governments: the People's Progress Party, led by Julius Chan, which draws most of its support from the Islands region; the People's Democratic Movement, led by Paias Wingti, which is often seen as a highlanders' party; and Pangu, which has national aspirations but continues to be identified with the Sepik region. Other parties of influence in the post-independence period include the People's Action Party, led by Ted Diro, the dominant 'Papuan' party; the Melanesian Alliance led by John Momis from Bougainville; the League for National Advancement headed at various times by Tony Siaguru and Barry Holloway; and, in the lead-up to the 1997 elections, the National Alliance headed by former prime minister Somare and the People's National Congress headed by the prime minister elected following the 1997 elections, Bill Skate.

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<sup>38</sup> Increasing party system fragmentation in recent years in two of these cases, India and Venezuela, has been associated with increasing political instability (Diamond, Linz and Lipset 1995, 35).

<sup>39</sup> Power and Gasiorowski also identified Israel as being a consolidated third world 'multi-party' democracy, but most comparative analyses place Israel squarely in the 'developed world' locus (see, for example, Lijphart 1984, 40-41).

Any attempt at analysing the nature of the PNG party system needs to begin with the difference in terms of political recruitment between parties in PNG and those in most other countries. Unlike their counterparts in other 'established' democracies, political parties in PNG have virtually no mass base and very limited input into the policy-making process. They function almost solely as parliamentary factions. Their extra-parliamentary functions range from the limited (intermittent roles as electoral machines) to the non-existent. The importance of parties lies in their role as aggregative groupings from which parliamentary coalitions can be built, and party leaders thus have an incentive to tie those candidates with a chance of electoral success to their party prior to an election. The combination of these factors has created a tendency for strong candidates to choose parties, rather than parties choosing the candidates, and for some parties in recent elections to 'endorse' multiple candidates in each seat, in the hope that the winner will thus vote with them once in parliament. This practice — which represents an attempt by party leaders, in the absence of other mobilising factors such as a party vote, to increase the prospects of a winner being aligned to 'their' party — itself contributes to the weakness of party loyalty and party discipline.

Although their importance has declined at each election, parties remain one of the few potential 'nationalising' institutions of PNG's political system, and can operate as a conduit for local candidates' identification with major personalities on the national stage. A party label enables a candidate to claim some form of relationship to a Somare, a Wingti or whoever, even if the two have never met and have no formal relationship whatsoever. Parties can thus provide a useful method of aligning a candidate to broader national politics within their own constituency, and to use the reflected prestige of major figures to help define their allegiances. In 1977, for example, Pangu campaigned under the slogan 'A vote for Pangu is a vote for Somare'; by 1982 a number of other parties had adopted this approach (Pokawin 1989, 245). This tendency was reinforced by the Electoral Commission's decision in 1987 to show photographs of the relevant party leader next to the names (and photographs) of all endorsed candidates on the ballot paper. Parties thus serve a functional purpose which actually reinforces the dominance of personality — a curious paradox, as the dominance of personality politics is one of the most frequently-cited factors undermining the development of political parties as meaningful entities in PNG politics (Saffu 1996, 6).

The other major rationale for intending candidates to claim a party endorsement is to take advantage of the utility of parties as resource providers — particularly for badges, t-shirts and other campaign material. Often, this appears to be the predominant reason for candidates claiming an association with a party in the first place. Parties also play a useful legitimating role, especially in cases of very high candidature, which enables some (endorsed) candidates to distinguish themselves from their (non-endorsed) competitors. Perhaps most importantly, parties may pay nomination fees, contribute to campaign expenses, and provide the paraphernalia of electoral campaign material. Pokawin has claimed that “the fact of financial support determined the affiliation of most candidates who claimed membership of political parties” (1989, 245). Candidates who receive financial assistance from a party are presumed more likely to remain faithful to that party in the post-election ‘horse-trading’ to build parliamentary majorities, where parties routinely extend financial ‘support’ to tempt potential party-swappers to gravitate to their camp post-election. Following the 1987 election, one newly-elected member claimed that he was offered K10,000 to change his support from the Wingti government to the opposition (Dorney 1990, 73).

#### *Reasons for a weak party system*

Most indicators of party strength in PNG (see Chapter Three) suggest that the influence of party, which has never been strong, has declined since a ‘peak’ in 1982, as increasing numbers of voters and candidates choose the option of independent candidacy rather than party affiliation. This coincides with similar long term trends, also analysed in Chapter Three, towards increasing numbers of candidates, high turnover rates of executive governments and elected politicians, increasingly small plurality vote totals for winning candidates and increasing levels of electoral violence and instability.

Explanations for the lack of institutionalisation of a meaningful party system in PNG can be divided into two broad categories: historical explanations, which emphasise those factors that ensured that PNG political parties were never an important part of the political landscape prior to independence, and contemporary explanations, which emphasise the reasons for the decline of the nascent party system present at the beginning of self-government in 1973. Historical explanations are largely based on the absence of nationalism as a political force in pre-independence PNG. Contemporary explanations focus more on the absence of defining cleavages in post-independence

PNG society around which parties can coalesce and develop. Both schools of thought are, of course, inter-related. Explanations for the lack of a meaningful party system replicate, in many ways, those advanced for the lack of any substantial nationalist movement: the dominance of traditional cultural and social cleavages, and the extremely localised and fragmented expression of these cleavages in a predominantly rural polity, which makes the development of any form of organised social movement, including political parties, extremely difficult.

In terms of historical explanations, Hegarty has argued that the development of nationalistic movements in PNG, and hence the development of political parties, was inhibited by three main factors. First, PNG's extreme ethnic fragmentation and topographical diversity hindered the development of a national consciousness, and the ongoing mutual antipathy between ethnic groups prevented co-operation or association between social elements. Secondly, Australian colonial rule was often paternalistic and tended to be authoritarian, non-participatory, and restrictive of political activity — to the extent of assigning special branch police to meetings of the first indigenous political party, the New Guinea United National Party, in 1965.<sup>40</sup> The third, and perhaps most important, factor in inhibiting the development of a nationalist movement was the absence of a sufficiently large and independent elite or middle class capable of sustaining such a movement. The class-based party structure of many other Westminster systems has never appeared likely in PNG.<sup>41</sup> PNG's indigenous elite was, at least initially, far too small to sustain any organised political movement; later, as the elite was co-opted into the process of colonial political and economic development, mobilisation of mass sentiment become unnecessary to the continuation of elite power (Hegarty 1979, 188).

Contemporary explanations for PNG's weak party system continue this theme. Relatively strong parties of the pre-independence period, such as Pangu and the United Party, were formed primarily to contest the issue of PNG's independence, and quickly lost their essential *raison d'être* with the announcement of the Australian departure and the handover of self-government. The main division between the parties — the question of the timing of self-government and independence — provided a sufficiently

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<sup>40</sup> See Wolfers 1970, 446, 475.

<sup>41</sup> See May 1984.



meaningful issue around which parties could coalesce. No similar issue has appeared in the post-independence period. Increasingly, party policies have converged towards a broad espousal of development-based politics within the framework of an (implicitly) capitalist state, with personalities becoming increasingly important, and patronage a more influential factor in electoral success than party backing. Even in Pangu's early period of mass support, the personal following of major figures like Michael Somare, Pita Lus and Tony Voutas was considerably more potent than that of the party itself. With the removal of the clear issue of the nature and timing of self-government and independence, personality became a dominant formative influence upon political parties in PNG.

In short, mass-based parties were initially unfeasible and later, by the time they were feasible, were generally seen as irrelevant to the core task of mobilising political support. Oliver has described PNG parties as "politicians' parties" which exist as "organisations for gaining access to governmental power pure and simple" (1989a, 10). He argues that the lack of any independence struggle was a defining point not just in the weakness of parties, but in their pervasive localism:

Because [parties] had not had to mobilize the electorate as a whole around a vital cause, like liberation, they were able to adapt themselves to the political culture of the village, rather than becoming an agency for change in that political culture. A political party could be quite successful if it just picked as candidates the people who most closely met the image of the successful leader that village political culture produced. It did not have to appeal to a national audience ... All the party had to do was pick the right man in the right place and give him enough backing to let him win (1989a, 10).

Similarly, Michael Somare has attributed the weakness of PNG's political parties at least partly to the nature of village life:

Here I find it difficult to organise political parties because they serve no purpose to an ordinary villager or even an urban worker, as he does not see the purpose of political organisation ... There is no common issue or enemy to bind the people together (1970, 490-91).

Both of these arguments make unconscious use of the cleavage model of party development, in which parties are formed and develop according to their reflection of underlying social, religious, economic or other cleavages within a society. Oliver recognises this to a degree, arguing that PNG is remarkable "in grafting village political perceptions onto a system of party government that seems inherently to demand a political culture that leads voters to choose on the basis of parties" (1989a, 10).

This pattern towards localised, policy-free politics was set from PNG's first elections under Australian rule in the 1960s. Because PNG had been given universal suffrage and national elections before it gained self-government (in contrast to the evolutionary progression of suffrage and democracy in the West), its first three national elections were a contest for prestige and village-level power, but not (with the partial exception of the 1972 election) a contest for government. Real political power remained in the hands of the colonial Administration, and ultimately with the Australian government, which retained a power of veto over House of Assembly legislation. This led to an imbalance between the executive and legislative roles of the House of Assembly: a parliament that facilitated representation but had little or no executive power was, as Paul Hasluck noted, more a glorified debating chamber, "a place for the expression of opinion", than a functioning legislature (1976, 398). Elected members predominantly saw themselves as "apprentice politicians rather than as parliamentarians elected to govern the country" (Colebatch, Colebatch, Reay and Strathern 1971, 222). Hence the Australian government's decision to attach some (indigenous) elected members as under-secretaries to (non-indigenous) official members to learn about the process of executive government and ministerial responsibilities. Thus one explanation for PNG's failure to develop a meaningful party system in the 1960s and 1970s was that parties were unnecessary: as there was no contest for real political power, there was no incentive for parties to form — they could not change government. The fact that the lack of disciplined parties is still apparent after more than 20 years of independence has forced a re-evaluation of this line of argument. Nonetheless, it remains clear that the early development of an effective party system in PNG was hampered by the way in which the lead-up to self-government and decolonisation was handled by the Australian colonial administration.

There has been a number of overt attempts by the PNG government to encourage the development of a meaningful party system in recent years. Since 1987 the PNG Electoral Commission has overtly attempted to encourage voters to identify with a particular party when casting their ballot by placing party names on the ballot paper and

by placing photos of the party leader on the ballot paper next to photos of the endorsed party candidate.<sup>42</sup> The results, according to Oliver, were mixed:

Voters simply couldn't ignore the fact that when voting for a candidate they were also voting for a party, unless of course they were supporting an independent. No-one, it seems, believes that the impact of this decision was significant; more than anything else, one suspects it raises the question of how far an electoral commissioner should go in attempting to influence the outcome of an election (1989a, 11).

More substantial mechanisms to encourage the growth and presence of political parties can be instituted via a system of registration and (most importantly) public funding of political parties. Such devices are a feature of many Western democracies, where party registration entitles parties to receive public funding and correspondingly obliges them to submit annual returns of income, expenditure and debts. For many parties, especially the smaller ones, public funding is essential to their continued financial viability. Despite occasional discussion, public funding of political parties has not been instituted in PNG, although a Constitutional Commission report in 1996 recommended that a legal regime regulating party registration and funding be instituted in PNG (Constitutional Review Commission 1996).

There thus remain few institutional incentives towards party formation and development inherent in PNG's electoral or parliamentary laws. Moreover, there are some provisions that could be viewed as disincentives to party formation and which contribute to parties remaining weak and undeveloped. A good example is the way Electoral Development Funds (EDFs) are distributed. Many of the 'exchange' obligations of contemporary politicians as traditional leaders are delivered via these funds, which are allocated to each MP for spending at his discretion within his electorate. EDFs were originally envisaged as a useful initiative for utilising a sitting member's intimate knowledge of local needs to by-pass bureaucratic bottlenecks and fund roads, bridges and other basic infrastructure where they were most needed in an electorate, thus (presumably) increasing overall living standards and cohesion. In practice, the provision of such direct funding has more often served to reinforce divisions at the local level, as funding is widely expected to be utilised by the winning candidate to reward his immediate clan network in order to fulfil exchange obligations and service supporters. The weakness of

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<sup>42</sup> Although at recent elections some candidates have specifically rejected party leaders' photographs on their election material and publicly disassociated themselves from their party leaders. Thanks to Ron May for this point.

the party system, the short periods in office of most politicians and the narrow ethnic base of electoral support for many members are all factors which encourage them to extract and distribute as much as possible from the state. Numerous MPs have openly favoured their own clan base in the distribution of EDFs; some have openly used the scheme to acquire personal wealth (Sherlock 1992, 4). In 1996, following pressure from the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and other donors, the EDF was abolished — only to be replaced by the Rural Action Program, which enables the spending of up to K500,000 in each electorate.<sup>43</sup> Like the EDFs, however, the fact that candidates rather than parties are the beneficiaries of and the conduits of these funds serves to reinforce the irrelevance and powerlessness of political parties in PNG.

### *The future of the PNG party system*

Parties are in decline not just in PNG but in most Western democracies as well. The reason for the 'dealignment' of voters from parties in Western democracies is complex, but one common cause appears to be the fact that those cleavages that enabled parties to penetrate deeply into societies — particularly class and religion, but to some extent 'ideology' as well — are themselves on the decline as factors affecting electoral behaviour (Bogdanor 1988, 385). Other common cleavages around which parties can form — such as regional or linguistic divisions — are also being mitigated by advances in communication technology and moves towards globalisation. It is important, therefore, to not evaluate developing countries such as PNG against some spurious 'Western model' of party structure, even if one existed. In PNG, class and ideology appear to be largely irrelevant as factors affecting voting behaviour. Religion is a factor in some areas where candidates attempt to use their membership of a church group to further their candidacy, but there is little evidence that it is a strong factor. Language and territorial divisions remain strong, but cleavages tend to exist at a micro-level, and are thus so fragmented as to hamper wider political association within an open electorate, much less a regional one. This leaves little beyond the personal capacity of the candidate concerned as a major factor in assessing voting patterns.

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<sup>43</sup> An electorate committee including members of provincial assemblies has the power to approve all Rural Action Program spending, rather than responsibility resting with the member alone, as was the case with EDFs. The committee will, however, be chaired by the MP for the electorate concerned, and together with committee members appointed by the MP, he or she will form part of a majority of committee membership.

If the experience of other countries is any guide, parties are unlikely to gain any real penetration into the hearts and minds of PNG voters until they are formed along cleavages which have some meaning to electors, both in terms of a distinctive policy platform and as a method of distinguishing their candidates from others. The most likely cleavage around which modern parties are likely to form remains one of region, but history suggests that the precursor for this is the emergence of a dominant personality figure around which other members of the budding political elite can coalesce, rather than the mobilisation of a distinctive grass-roots political sentiment. Nevertheless, Saffu's analysis of political behaviour in PNG found that, alone amongst the major social variables (class, gender, age, religion, region of origin and residence) which affect voter choice, "only the region of residence appears to lead to significant political differences" (1989, 30). Other experienced observers of PNG elections have reinforced this conclusion: May's assessment of over 20 years of analysing elections in East Sepik, for example, concluded that "there has been little progress towards an integrative, ideologically-based party system" and that even in the East Sepik, where party loyalty has been maintained over several elections, the value of party endorsement lies in the identification of some parties with the Sepik itself (May 1996b, 239). However, any development of parties based predominantly on regional considerations is more likely to encourage local autonomy movements and separatism than be a focus for national politics (Griffin and Kawona 1989, 241).

## Conclusion

The continuing weakness of PNG's party system has been a surprise to some academic observers who clearly expected the development of some type of meaningful party system after independence.<sup>44</sup> More than just not developing, the salience of political parties in PNG has declined considerably since the early 1980s. In 1979, Hegarty argued that the important role played by parties in PNG was not as entities to mobilise popular sentiment, but rather as mechanisms through which the political elite gain access to, manipulate and retain political power (Hegarty 1979, 188). Even this limited definition of function is now questionable, as increasingly it has become clear that independent status is no hindrance to a successful candidature — over half of all candidates and approximately one-third of elected members at the 1992 and 1997

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<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Clunies Ross 1970, 517-27.

elections were actually independents. With the erosion of this mechanistic function has gone much of the *raison d'être* for parties' extra-parliamentary existence. In the absence of any cleavage powerful enough to encourage the development of parties which have strong mass appeal, it is likely that the PNG party system will continue to fragment and dissipate in the foreseeable future.<sup>45</sup> It also appears likely, however, that PNG's ability to 'muddle through' as a competitive democracy will proceed as well, making it one of the more unusual examples of a competitive democracy for scholars of comparative politics in the world today.

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<sup>45</sup> For a discussion and similar conclusion about the role of parties in PNG, see Constitutional Review Commission 1996, 20-26.

### Chapter Three: Elections in Papua New Guinea 1964-1997

The previous chapter has suggested that the persistence of democracy in PNG can be explained by the combination of PNG's extraordinary ethnic fragmentation, its traditionally competitive social structures and the successful inculcation of British-style constitutionalism by the Australian administration in the lead up to self-government and independence in the early 1970s. But if PNG's social structures and colonial history are not in conflict with the *concept* of democracy, the *practice* of representative democracy in PNG has increasingly been questioned since independence. In particular a number of factors have been identified which are at variance with the practice of parliamentary government in established democracies and which are increasingly seen as evidence of a slide towards 'ungovernability' in PNG.<sup>1</sup> At the electoral level, these factors include: a diffuse and fragmented party system; high candidacy rates; very low support levels for some successful candidates; vote-splitting, electoral fraud, vote-buying and other 'anti-system' activities; low party identification on the part of the electorate; frequent 'party-hopping' on the part of MPs; high turnover of MPs from one election to the next; high levels of election petitions and other protests from unsuccessful candidates involving allegations of improper practice and occasional judicial overturning of election results; frequent votes of no-confidence on the floor of the house, and a rejection of accepted parliamentary conventions such as ministerial responsibility or cabinet solidarity. Not all of these factors are in themselves problematic; indeed some (such as high candidacy rates) would, in other circumstances, be evidence of a highly participatory political culture. However, when taken together — and many of the factors listed above are intimately related — they suggest serious difficulties with PNG's system of government. In particular, they highlight a range of problems concerning PNG's electoral system.

The issue of PNG's electoral system has been identified by a number of senior government figures in both Port Moresby and Canberra as one of PNG's major public policy concerns. Former Public Service Minister, Anthony Siaguru, for example, has identified failures in PNG's constitutional and electoral systems as the primary security issue facing PNG<sup>2</sup>, while the Australian Parliament's Joint Committee on Foreign

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<sup>1</sup> See Jennings 1990, 16.

<sup>2</sup> See Siaguru 1989, 63.

Affairs, Defence and Trade has expressed similar sentiments in two official reports (1989, 205-6; 1991, 34-5). The level of electoral violence and electoral fraud in some highlands areas has reached the point where a number of observers have warned that it threatens the very existence of the PNG state.<sup>3</sup>

Increasing attention has been given to the role of political institutions in fostering or retarding these trends. Former Prime Minister Sir Julius Chan has argued for a series of constitutional changes to PNG's electoral and parliamentary systems to alter the balance of the executive-legislature relationship (1988, 248). Former Electoral Commissioner Luke Lucas, Siaguru and numerous other politicians and commentators have called for a return to the AV electoral system in use until independence ('Lucas outlines poll proposals', *Post-Courier*, 23 June 1988; Griffin and King 1982, 33; 'Dutton: voting system cause of difficulties', *Post-Courier*, 31 August 1995), or for more radical changes to the electoral system such as the introduction of proportional representation ('Somare Calls for Reforms', *Post Courier*, 4 May 1988; Deklin 1992, 44). Tony Regan, a legal adviser to the PNG government, has said that "changes to the electoral system which might make elected politicians more accountable to a wider electorate might have positive benefits for constitutionalism in PNG" (1995, 15). Even Australian defence analysts have expressed similar sentiments, arguing that "some comparatively minor 'tinkering' with constitutional clauses or with electoral legislation can have a major impact" on more stable politics in PNG (Jennings 1990, 17). The failure of the electoral system to produce stable and effective government is thus seen as an issue that goes beyond one of government function to having wider implications for PNG's security, stability and long-term viability as a nation state. This is a particularly striking aspect of debate on electoral reform in PNG. Electoral systems in most democracies are rarely argued about (except by a small handful of political scientists), more rarely changed, and almost never equated with wider questions of defence and security interests. In PNG, by contrast, these issues are periodically at the centre of political debate, and have been for some time.

The centrality given to questions of constitutional and electoral reform raises the question of the *effect* of political institutions such as the electoral system upon politics in PNG. As will be detailed in Chapter Four, at one level the effect has varied quite

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Standish 1994, 71.



dramatically: elections under the AV system used in the 1964-1972 period tended to produce a more co-operative, moderate style of campaigning, while elections under FPTP have increasingly become violent, zero-sum contests for success. Chapter Four will also examine the way in which FPTP elections appear to have encouraged increasingly high levels of candidature, due in part to the extremely small vote totals needed for election under that system. But other areas of the electoral system have exhibited considerable continuity, regardless of the electoral system in use, and are indicative of the weakness of PNG's party system and the exceptionally competitive and participative nature of elections in PNG. These include a number of characteristics which are quite striking in comparative terms: a 'parish pump' concentration on local and regional rather than national issues; a high degree of turnover of politicians from one election to the next; a weak and fragmented party system; an unstable executive government characterised by frequent 'party-hopping' by elected MPs; and high levels of participation and turnout by the electorate. This chapter will place these characteristics of PNG politics in the context of PNG's strong local societies but weak state institutions. These factors will then be examined in terms of their effect upon the conduct of PNG politics.

### **Strong society, weak state: the importance of elections in PNG**

New states such as PNG face many diffuse impediments to nation-building: the need to tailor their introduced political systems to the reality of their indigenous political cultures; the need to come to terms with the disparities between class, ethnic and regional groupings within a state; the realities of their geography and consequent pressures towards fragmentation or secession; the conflict between traditional and modern approaches to resource distribution; and the weakness of the state apparatus itself. In fact, in many ways PNG is an extreme example of what Migdal (1988) called a 'strong society, weak state', in which the strength and importance of traditional social forces far outstrips the capacity of the modern state. But paradoxically, the role of the state in PNG is often more significant than in many 'developed' countries. Traditional Western conceptualisations of the state have tended to regard it ideally as a detached or neutral agent which constructs an arena for political competition through universally accepted legitimising devices such as concepts of democracy, freedom of speech, the rule of law and the idea of citizenship. In developing countries like PNG, however,

these concepts are relatively unimportant in terms of mobilising the consent of the governed. By contrast, the state plays an interventionist role via its centrality in controlling access to resources and in directly mediating conflict.

In PNG, as in many other developing countries, access to the resources of the state is a (perhaps the) crucial determinant of political action, as the state, not the market, is itself the primary instrument for accumulation of resources such as foreign aid and domestic revenue. Few Papua New Guineans have significant roles in the limited private sector that exists in PNG, and hence there is a tendency to view the state as the main avenue for accessing wealth. The structure of state institutions is thus of importance not just in the political arena, but also in the wider arena of competition for goods, services and other resources. This in turn means that the struggle for control of the state is a game with much higher stakes than simply access to *political* power: it also holds out the promise of access to considerable financial resources which are effectively unattainable elsewhere.

But while the state is clearly forced into playing this role in PNG, it is equally clearly incapable of delivering satisfactory outcomes to all players. As the stakes are raised, the capacity of the state to deliver acceptable outcomes decreases, because increasing numbers of actors are competing for the same rewards. Heightened competition means heightened divisions between competing actors, with a consequently sharpened delineation of clan, ethnic, linguistic and regional cleavages. As Brown has argued, in such a situation state institutions and political parties increasingly tend to function as “political machines for the distribution of resources” and politics itself becomes a competition for access to the state (Brown 1989, 52-53). This sharpened delineation tends, if anything, to reinforce the centrality of the state as a means of accessing wealth: some of the most hard-fought conflicts, such as election campaigns, are directly concerned with access to the state, thus reinforcing the message that the state is the key to power, prestige and resources, and encouraging more and more participants in the future. The institutional structures which provide the means of access to the state are thus of crucial importance. In PNG, the most effective means of access to the state is by being elected as a Member of Parliament. Because the structure of funding for infrastructure and other projects is often more closely aligned to individual MPs than the central bureaucracy (particularly via the Electoral Development Funds scheme and its

replacement, the Rural Action Program, described in the previous Chapter), elected parliamentarians are often the central conduit for the distribution of large amounts of public funds, especially in rural areas. This places additional pressure on the institutions of state which determine access to these parliamentary positions.

The primary institution which determines access to parliamentary membership and additional perquisites such as ministerial office is, of course, the electoral system. Elections in general are also events which have a wider meaning in PNG than the action of voting for candidates to the National Parliament. For many areas of PNG, elections also provide one of the few 'nationalising' events in which citizens participate. In some remote areas, for example, the five-yearly cycle of candidate selection, campaigning and polling day may be one of the only times that they have an opportunity to interact with the state. The fact that this activity is performed as part of a national event, with national implications, makes it especially significant.<sup>4</sup>

### **The structure of parliamentary representation**

Papua New Guinea has a unicameral national parliament composed of a two-tier system of 109 members elected from 89 'open' electorates of approximately equal population size, and 20 'regional' electorates based on the boundaries of the 19 provinces and the National Capital District. Parliamentary terms last for five years, and parliaments have so far run their full term, despite several changes of government on the floor of parliament. National elections have been held in 1964, 1968, 1972, 1977, 1982, 1987, 1992 and 1997.

For most of its independent history PNG had a 'quasi-federal' system of local and provincial government, as part of a package of constitutional amendments passed in 1976 designed to head-off the looming secessionism on Bougainville and elsewhere (May and Regan 1997). While the 1975 Constitution provided for a unitary state, the rise of secessionist sentiment in Bougainville, the Gazelle Peninsula, Papua and elsewhere around the time of independence prompted the first Prime Minister, Michael Somare, to agree in August 1976 to a system of provincial and local governments similar to those originally proposed by the CPC (Ghai and Regan 1992, 49-76). The

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<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to Hank Nelson for this point.

boundaries of the 19 provinces thus adopted in general followed those of the 19 administrative districts of the former Australian administration, plus the National Capital District (which is treated as a province for representational purposes). Between 1977 and 1995, each of these provinces had its own elected assembly and an executive council headed by a premier, and were constitutionally responsible for a range of specified powers. In 1995, however, there was a marked shift back towards centralisation of power following the abolition of provincial governments in all provinces save Bougainville, where the provincial government system continues to operate under special arrangements. The 1995 *Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local-Level Governments* provides for provincial assemblies, exercising a similar range of functions to their predecessors, composed of all members of the National Parliament from the province; heads of rural local-level governments; one representative of the heads of urban authorities and urban councils; up to three paramount chiefs or their appointed nominees representing local areas where the chieftaincy system is in existence and is accepted; one nominated woman representative; and up to three additional members. Taken together, these reforms have introduced a number of changes in terms of representation at the provincial level, including a form of direct election to a statutory position (as the elected regional MP will automatically become the chair of the provincial assembly and head of the provincial government), functional representation for specified groups, representation of traditional interests in the form of paramount chiefs, and the statutory inclusion of a female representative.<sup>5</sup>

The membership of the National Parliament is determined by section 101 of the Constitution, which provides for three different types of members. The most common form of members are those from 'open electorates'. Section 101 of the Constitution provides for "a number of members to be elected from single-member open electorates", with the precise number of these electorates to be provided in an Organic Law.<sup>6</sup> Section 34(1) of the *Organic Law on National Elections* (hereafter OLNE) states that "in no case shall the number of open electorates be less than 81 or more than 91". These open electorates must also be approximately equal in population, within a tolerance of plus or

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<sup>5</sup> For more information see May, forthcoming.

<sup>6</sup> 'Organic laws' have the status of constitutional law, and were introduced in PNG in order to keep the Constitution focussed on basic principles and institutions. Despite this, the PNG Constitution is one of the longest in the world.

minus 20%, and must not cut across provincial boundaries (OLNE, s.35). Since the first and (so far) only post-independence boundary determination in 1977, there have been 89 open electorates. These electorates were demarcated on the basis of census figures from 1971, and have not been revised to take account of changes in population. The average population size of each open electorate at the 1997 election was around 46,000 people, or 38,360 registered voters — a number that varied considerably from the largest electorate (Lagaip-Pogera Open in the highlands, which had 84,578 registered voters) to the smallest (Rabaul Open with 15,977 registered voters).<sup>7</sup>

Section 101 of the Constitution also provides for “a number of members elected from single-member provincial electorates”. These provincial electorates have their origins in ten ‘Special Electorates’ reserved for expatriate candidates at the 1964 elections. After extensive consultations following the 1964 election, the Select Committee on Constitutional Development recommended the establishment of fifteen non-racial regional electorates to replace the ten existing Special Electorates.<sup>8</sup> However, *de facto* racial qualifications remained through educational qualifications for nomination.<sup>9</sup> In 1971, the *Second Select Committee on Constitutional Development* reported an “overwhelming request for increased representation” around the country. The Committee noted that there had been some call for the removal of regional electorates, although the Committee itself made it clear it did not support this view. But by 1975, there had been “a considerable shift in opinion on this matter”, and the CPC unanimously recommended that regional electorates be abolished, arguing that “the original reasons for regional electorates has been largely invalidated by the increasing numbers of well educated people returned from open electorates” (1974, 6/1). Moreover, the constitutional provisions on citizenship, and increasing standards of literacy, meant that the formal educational qualifications which were the basis of regional electorates were no longer necessary. The government, however, successfully argued for a retention of such electorates “in order to retain greater representation in the Parliament for the less populous districts” (Goldring 1978, 41-42).

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<sup>7</sup> Figures supplied by PNG Electoral Commission.

<sup>8</sup> The 15 electorates which were eventually demarcated followed the existing boundaries of 12 administrative districts, with three others encompassing two adjacent districts (Gulf and Western in Papua, East and West New Britain, and New Ireland and Manus).

<sup>9</sup> The racial qualification for candidature was replaced with an educational qualification, the Territory Intermediate Certificate ‘or equivalent’. See Parker and Wolfers 1971, 36-37.

Some commentators have also argued that provincial electorates serve a useful purpose by forcing candidates “to transcend narrow, localized tribal and clan loyalties in reaching out for support in a larger territorial unit”, and point out that a number of PNG’s most prominent politicians have been elected from provincial electorates (Wijeweera 1989, 40). There is persuasive evidence for this latter point: of the 1992-1997 parliament, such prominent figures as Michael Somare (East Sepik), John Momis (Bougainville), Paias Wingti (Western Highlands), Chris Haiveta (Gulf) and Peter Barter (Madang) were all elected from regional, rather than open, electorates. Although it is impossible to be categorical, it seems likely that the need for candidates to appeal to a much wider cross-section of voters may encourage candidature from those who have more to offer than a solid clan or tribal support base alone. The requirement to appeal to a wider political audience than one’s own extended kinship network means that judgements about a candidate’s suitability for public office — their intelligence, tolerance, impartiality or genuine devotion to public service — are likely to play a more important role than questions of their clan affiliations. It also means that those people possessed of these relatively rare qualities (which includes, it should be stated, an ability to put the public interest before their own) are more likely to run for office if they are being judged on their personal characteristics rather than their tribal support base. The reality of PNG politics means that it is almost impossible for even a genuinely outstanding candidate to be elected in many open seats without a substantial clan support base.

Prior to independence, a coherent sense of national identity had not emerged under the Australian colonial administration, and the majority of political activity was regional and parochial. The devolution of power to provincial governments following independence was a tacit acknowledgment of heterogeneity. The quasi-federal nature of this arrangement was also an acceptance of the special needs and interests of PNG’s provinces. One consequence of this was the effective introduction of a regional weighting in favour of the smaller provinces, particularly the Island Provinces, into PNG politics, which remains today. While such arrangements are not uncommon in other diverse federal societies (Australia and the USA both use their Senate to weight representation in favour of smaller, less populous States), the incorporation of this weighting in a unicameral legislature is relatively unusual. The advantages of this structure of representation has long been recognised by some of the more astute islands

politicians: Julius Chan told the Select Committee on Constitutional Development in 1971 that regional seats were useful in providing adequate representation for districts with small populations.<sup>10</sup> A comparison of the relative sizes of provincial electorates at the 1997 election confirms this: they varied in size from 364,191 voters (Southern Highlands Provincial) to 26,833 voters (Manus Provincial).

The constitutional provision for the third type of member provided by the Constitution has never, in fact, been utilised.<sup>11</sup> Under section 101, up to three members may be ‘nominated’ to office by a two-thirds majority of the parliament, rather than elected to it. There is a history of official and non-appointed members in PNG legislative bodies, going back to the colonial legislative councils of the 1950s, and this provision reflects this history, being intended to give the PNG parliament the opportunity to include expertise from outside the legislature within its ranks. However, the nominated seat provision has never been used and, in the words of the General Constitutional Commission,

there is no prospect that it ever will be used ... in our system of democracy representatives from all levels of government should be directly elected by the people. There should be no exception made for any one who is going to enjoy the same powers, rights and privileges as those whose mandate is hard-won through direct election (1983, 113).

This view remains current today. The contest for parliamentary office in PNG is too intense, and the rewards too great, to countenance its being given away to an outsider. The closest the provision has come to being used was at the height of the Bougainville crisis in 1991, when the then Minister for the Interior, Karl Stack, urged the government to consider using the provision to appoint three Bougainvilleans to parliament, arguing that such steps were crucial to ensuring the survival of the PNG state.<sup>12</sup>

Taken together, these representative arrangements of overlapping ‘open’ and ‘provincial’ electorates reflect PNG’s geographic and ethnic diversity — a diversity which was to be emphasised after independence by a change in redistribution criteria. Prior to 1975 many of the electoral and local government boundaries reflected the sub-districts and census divisions of the colonial administration and were thus “based on ethnic considerations” (Stone, 1976a, 46) — explicitly in the case of the distribution

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<sup>10</sup> See Stone 1976a, 43.

<sup>11</sup> Nominated members have, however, been appointed to provincial assemblies.

<sup>12</sup> See *Hansard*, 20 August 1991, *passim*.

criteria used in 1964, which divided the country into 'electoral zones', made up of autonomous 'Open' and 'Special' Electorates, "determined on the basis of geographic isolation (as in the cases of the island districts), ethnography and communications" (Chief Electoral Officer, 1964, 1). The zones agreed upon were the five major island groups of Manus, New Ireland, Bougainville and New Britain, and a corresponding division of the mainland (into Milne Bay, Sepik, South, North-East and Highlands). Each zone was then divided into electorates "on a strictly mathematical basis", following the (then) Australian practice of a maximum 20 percent deviation from the mean size of electorates. "Tribal and linguistic affiliations" were to be taken into account where possible, as were issues of accessibility in "sparsely populated areas" (Chief Electoral Officer 1964a, 2). While the extreme fragmentation of PNG's ethnic groups means that this criteria was not (and could not have been) directed at forming electorates dominated by one ethnic group, it did mean that ethnic factors could at least be considered so that (for example) villages would not be divided in two by an electoral boundary.

Since independence, this situation has changed markedly. The role of recommending the number and boundaries of open electorates is in the hands of an independent Boundaries Commission, whose recommendations parliament can accept or reject but not amend. This latter provision has had a major impact on the composition of the National Parliament, as the past three Boundary Commission reports (in 1981, 1985 and 1991) were rejected by parliament for what appeared to be shamelessly self-interest reasons. As a consequence, the boundaries delimited for the first post-independence elections in 1977, utilising census data from 1971, have been used ever since. The primary criterion for the drawing of these boundaries was the requirement for equality of representation laid down in section 125(2) of the Constitution (Wijeweera 1989, 38-40). This has effectively changed the dominant criterion for assessing electoral boundaries from one of 'community of interest' issues, such as language, ethnicity and geography, to numeric equality.<sup>13</sup> The high growth rate and mobility of PNG's population means that most electorates are today almost certainly malapportioned, as

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<sup>13</sup> This factor is an almost universal aspect of uninominal district electoral boundaries drawn to maintain population parity, as it is a rare community whose natural borders coincide with electoral ones. As Steed has noted, "most single-member constituencies are thoroughly artificial, ephemeral pieces of territory which have no meaning outside the electoral context" (1985, 282).



the above-mentioned disparity between enrolments in Lagaip-Pogera and Rabaul well illustrates.

Table 3.1 outlines the changing composition of the PNG legislature since the first national elections in 1964, consisting of a series of rapid changes in the period prior to independence followed by a period of stability and in some ways sclerosis since then.

**Table 3.1: Composition of House of Assembly and National Parliament 1964-1997**

Year	Open Electorates	Regional Electorates	Other	Total Parliamentary Membership
1964	44 members	10 members elected from "Special Electorates", reserved for non-indigenous candidates	10 official members, made up of senior Administration officials	64 members in total — 54 elected, 10 appointed
1968	69 members	15 members elected from "Regional Electorates", reserved for candidates holding Intermediate Certificate or equivalent	10 official members, made up of senior Administration officials	94 members in total — 84 elected, 10 appointed
1972	82 members	18 members elected from "Regional Electorates", reserved for candidates holding Intermediate Certificate or equivalent	4 official members, made up of senior Administration officials	104 members in total — 100 elected, 4 appointed
1977-1997	89 members	20 members elected from "Provincial Electorates" demarcated on the 19 Provinces and the National Capital District	None	109 members in total — all elected

### Characteristics of PNG elections

There are a number of ways in which the electoral system appears to have impacted upon the conduct of politics in PNG. Some of these are examined in detail in the following chapter, as they appear to be specific responses to the different mechanics of the two systems used in PNG to date. For example, it will be argued that the co-operative and accommodative behaviour by candidates evidenced at PNG's early elections was, in part, encouraged by the incentives for election presented by the AV voting system used until 1975. Similarly, factors such as increasingly high candidate rates and increasing electoral violence are argued to be directly related to the introduction of FPTP at independence. But there are other factors which, regardless of the specific electoral formula used, are nonetheless characteristic features of elections in

PNG, and which appear to be encouraged by other aspects of PNG's electoral institutions. Five of these are particularly notable by comparative standards and will be examined here: the significance of local factors and regionalism in PNG electoral politics; the marked turnover of incumbent politicians from one election to the next; the weak and fragmented party system; the instability of membership amongst parliamentary parties and governing coalitions; and the consistently high rates of voter participation and turnout in all PNG elections to date.

### *Regionalism*

In a state with significant regional divisions, elections can serve to accentuate the polarising effects of regional variation: Lewis has written of the need to find electoral systems which avoid "geographical conflict, and the racial, religious or other differences which go with geography" (1965, 72). At election time, geographical conflict can be manifested in a number of ways. The very action of dividing territory into smaller political units has implications for future geographical conflicts. Where boundaries run along ethnic lines, they serve to regulate a pre-existing state of affairs, focusing conflict between constituencies and representatives. These conflicts can also be expressed at the parliamentary level through the elected representatives, and via party groupings based on regional and/or ethnic ties. Some scholars argue that the choice of electoral system can have a substantial influence on the degree of regionalism apparent in a political system, and that single-member district systems in particular serve to encourage a regionally-based politics. Irvine, for example, contends that politicians seeking to maximise their chances of electoral success will

frame their appeals and expend campaign resources of time and money (including whatever pre-election patronage they can muster) in those regions where they have the best chance of success and to ignore regions that are less favourable to their party ... as a result of these incentives, strongest in a country with a plurality electoral system, party support becomes increasingly concentrated in particular regions of the country (1988, 15-16).

Because single-member systems seek to find the 'best' single representative for a territorially defined community, it is not in candidates' interests to seek to reflect a range of ideologies and policy preferences. Rather, as Irvine has shown, they seek to avoid such issues and concentrate their efforts away from specific ideological or policy platforms (1988, 23). This feature of single-member representation is amplified in PNG by the FPTP electoral system and the lack of an ideologically-coherent party system. In competitive and fragmented areas such as those in the highlands, candidates can (and

often do) ignore large sections of unfriendly territory, concentrating instead on maximising their vote in their 'home' regions — a point which will be examined in more detail in the following chapter. The result is that rational candidates, responding to electoral incentives, will emphasise both the importance of region and the irrelevance of ideology or policy in their platforms. They will also attempt to campaign as efficiently and inexpensively as possible — which, in PNG, often means localising their appeal and effort as much as possible to secure the (minimum) plurality vote needed for election.

PNG elections tend to be highly localised affairs, and the parish-pump nature of most campaigns encourages a high degree of personal contact (and exchange) between campaigning politicians and voters. A succession of electoral studies has emphasised the need for visibility and personal contact when campaigning: the importance of “seeing the face” of a candidate.<sup>14</sup> This factor is accentuated by PNG’s Westminster political institutions and, particularly, its use of single-member electoral districts as the base geographic unit of the political system. By confining electoral competition to a small, geographically-defined area, PNG’s political institutions accentuate local or regional cleavages within electorates and emphasise the importance of personalities — a tendency which sharply affects the development of a localistic political culture and a personality-based party system. Because of the importance of local issues, rational politicians in PNG need to devote much of their time and energy to constituency service. In this they are similar to their counterparts in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States, all of whom expend significant energies on servicing their constituency. In a landmark comparative study, Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina (1987) found that those members who engaged in extensive constituency service were better known, more favourably evaluated by their electorate, and more successful electorally than less conscientious members. Significantly, the single-member district system was seen as being a major institutional explanation for their behaviour (1987, chap. 9). The focus on constituency issues that typifies the behaviour of many PNG politicians is thus, as in other areas, partly a rational response to the institutional incentives presented by the electoral system.

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<sup>14</sup> Summarised in Saffu 1989, 19-20.

The highly localised focus of PNG politics is accentuated by provisions concerning the eligibility of candidates to nominate for election. While many countries require a budding local member to have established some prior contact with the district he or she wants to represent prior to standing for election, PNG goes further than most by requiring the intending member to have a prior *residence-based relationship* with the constituency: any nominating candidate must be at least 25 years old, be a qualified voter *and* be born in that electorate or have been continuously resident there for the two years prior to nomination or for five years at any time (Constitution, section 103).

This takes the legislative requirement for localism farther than most democracies elsewhere and, when combined with the powerful institutional and social forces outlined above, is a further pressure towards constituency-focused politics. Such residential qualifications can also lead to surreal administrative difficulties, such as the reported occasion in the late 1960s when a star-fix had to be obtained to clarify in which electorate a particular candidate, whose home-base straddled two electorates, was qualified to stand.<sup>85</sup>

This responsiveness at the level of the individual constituency leads to collective irresponsibility at the level of the national political system. There is simply not enough incentive for PNG parliamentarians to focus on national, as opposed to local and regional, interests (even those of the electorate as a whole rather than the candidate's 'home' area). The parliamentarian has two mutually incompatible responsibilities: a focus on the national good, and a focus on expressing the interests of his constituency, and extracting benefits for them from the state. While this conflict is fed by PNG's clan-based society and non-ideological, development-based politics, it is pushed along by the clientelist nature of localised politics focused on territorial representation. To quote Bogdanor:

There is, in fact, a deep-seated conflict between the notions of geographical representation and responsible party government, between the representation of territory and the representation of opinion. In a political system dominated by the clash of parties, the parliamentarian's constituency is likely to be of subordinate importance for him; while a system in which the dominant focus is the constituency will probably not articulate opposing interests and opinions very successfully (1983, 300).

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<sup>85</sup> See Wolfers and Regan 1988, 7/3.

In the context of PNG's divided and fragmented society, where the focus is indeed the constituency, there is a consistent emphasis upon constituency-based concerns rather than national policy interests. In their comparative study of constituency campaigning, Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina found that representatives in most countries saw constituency service as being important, but that those in marginal seats saw it as being of particular importance, and directed their efforts accordingly: "the level of casework effort is related to the representative's vulnerability as measured by the margin of victory in the previous election" (1987, 96). In PNG, as Sir Julius Chan has noted, almost every seat is a marginal seat, and the logic of devoted constituency campaigning thus applies almost universally.<sup>16</sup>

The localism of party strategies is also strongly influenced by the electoral system. Under single-member systems such as AV or FPTP, there is an enormous electoral advantage in having an efficiently distributed vote. This does not, however, mean an evenly distributed vote. In fact, an even distribution of votes across all electorates would almost certainly see a party win no seats at all. In Australia, for example, the regionally-based National Party (which represents rural communities) and the ideologically-based Australian Democrats both receive around 10-15% of the vote at national elections, but the National Party is a well-established party in the House of Representatives while the Democrats have never won a lower-house seat. This is because the total size of a party's vote is less relevant to winning single-member district seats than the spatial distribution of the votes between constituencies. A party that is regionally-based and assiduously cultivates its regional support can achieve a much higher seats-votes ratio than a party which spreads its support level too thinly over a wider area. Of course, a determined regional focus from a party presumes a significant level of party organisation and party identification amongst voters — two prerequisites in short supply in PNG.

Regionalism as a factor in PNG politics received limited attention in early electoral studies.<sup>17</sup> However, the overriding importance of region of residence as a predictor of political behaviour which Saffu identified in his study of voting behaviour at the 1987 election has served to highlight regional explanations of electoral choice (1989, 31).

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<sup>16</sup> See Dorney 1990, 61.

<sup>17</sup> For a survey see Anere 1989, 51-58.

The incumbent electoral structure means that any party — particularly a new party — wishing to gain significant parliamentary representation will have to focus, at least initially, at the regional — rather than national — level. Most major parties in PNG have a regional base: for example, the Peoples Progress Party in the Islands region, the Peoples Democratic Movement in the Highlands, Pangu in Momase and the Peoples Action Party in Papua (Saffu 1996, 31-32). Even parties hailed as ‘ideological’, such as the Melanesian Alliance, appear to rely as much on their regional appeal as their policy platforms for their electoral success.<sup>18</sup> The importance of regional factors also means that major groupings need to be included in positions of power to allay potential conflict. In PNG, ministries and other government positions are allocated at least partly on the basis of region, and the need to strike the right balance of Papuans, north coast New Guineans, Highlanders and Islanders. The National Executive Council (the PNG cabinet) invariably fills to its maximum possible size of 28 members (plus a host of associated or sometimes invented positions).

#### *Incumbent turnover*

One notable feature of the electoral system in PNG is its facility for encouraging a high degree of turnover of incumbent politicians. In all national elections since 1964 the turnover rates of incumbents has been extremely high by world standards. Roughly half of all members have been voted out after only one term of office, a rate that has held relatively constant for cabinet ministers and even party leaders. Only one member — Sir Pita Lus— has been elected to every parliament since the first elections in 1964, while one other high-profile politician — Sir Michael Somare— has been elected in seven successive national elections, and two others — John Momis and John Kaputin — in six. But most MPs are not returned to office — at the 1992 and 1997 elections, for example, over half of all sitting members were not re-elected. Table 3.2 sets out the rate of incumbent turnover for all PNG elections to date.

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<sup>18</sup> See King 1989, 25.

**Table 3.2: Turnover rates of PNG parliamentarians 1964-1997**

Year	Sitting MPs re-elected	Percentage re-elected	Sitting MPs not re-elected	Percentage not re-elected	Total no of elected MPs
1968	23	50	23	50	84
1972	38	52	35	48	100
1977	35	38	56	62	109
1982	50	48	53	52	109
1987	56	53	48	47	109
1992	44	40	65	60	109
1997	51	48	57	52	109

Source: Electoral Office reports 1968-1997. The Table refers only to sitting MPs seeking re-election.

As Table 3.2 makes clear, the re-election rate of incumbent MPs has actually been quite consistent over six elections, hovering around the 50% mark, with a trough of 38% in 1977, the first post-independence elections, and a high of 53% in 1987. While almost every examination of PNG politics mentions this high turnover rate of incumbents, there have been relatively few analyses of the reasons for it. 'Social' explanations have tended to focus on voters' expectation of their MPs as a central point for 'distributive' politics. Under this explanation, members can increase their 'bank' of existing votes through increased prestige, displays of wealth, and, most importantly, direct patronage in the form of gifts, beer, pigs, petrol and increasingly cash. MPs who do not deliver are not re-elected. Government MPs should have an advantage over others by virtue of their access to government resources and opportunities to distribute patronage and, and there is some evidence of a higher re-election rate for government members than those in opposition.<sup>19</sup> But in general sitting MPs, despite the built-in advantages of incumbency in terms of the prestige of their position and the resources available to them, are more likely to not be re-elected than they are to gain another term in office. In political science terms they are electorally 'vulnerable', and there are sufficient cases of MPs who have distributed large amounts of gifts and patronage (e.g. Iambakey Okuk in 1982) or appear to hold positions of considerable personal prestige (e.g. party leader Tony Siaguru in 1987) losing their seats, to encourage a search for other explanations beyond these 'social' factors.

David Hegarty, who has conducted probably the most detailed examination of electoral vulnerability in PNG, concluded that MPs with low winning margins and high numbers

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<sup>19</sup> See Hegarty 1983, 15.

of opponents are more likely to be defeated than those with substantial winning margins and few potential challengers (1982). This is intuitively obvious: assuming an even spread of votes then the higher the number of challengers, the lower the total vote share required for victory and the smaller the likely margin between first and second. The FPTP electoral system is again a factor here: by enabling candidates with very small total vote shares to be elected, the electoral system both encourages high candidate numbers and increases the likelihood that sitting MPs with a small bloc vote will fail to be re-elected. Moreover, the evidence of the pre-independence elections suggests that elections held under AV had a lower turnover rate than elections under FPTP (although the difference is not large: a 51.5 percent re-election rate under AV compared to a 45.4 percent re-election rate under FPTP). Again, both these tendencies point to the electoral system being an important contributing factor to the high turnover rates of sitting MPs.

Finally, what have been the effects of the high rates of incumbent turnover upon PNG politics? There are two competing arguments. One is that the instability of support bases for most candidates and the consequent loss of continuity in parliamentary experience represents another facet of a crisis of legitimacy for PNG politics. The opposing view is that high incumbency turnover, like the high numbers of contesting candidates or the high rates of turnout by voters, are all evidence of a highly participatory political system in which voters are aware and involved in politics, have high expectations of their elected representatives, and have every opportunity to discard politicians who have failed to impress. Perhaps the truth lies somewhere in between. Although there is no doubt that the vulnerability of many MPs creates a heightened degree of accountability towards the electorate, and is further evidence of the essential dynamism of PNG political culture, the continued loss of experienced and able politicians at every election, particularly ministers who have proved their ability in the complex task of running a government, is a debilitating drain on PNG's political capital.

#### *A weak party system*

Most broad indicators of party numbers and cohesion suggest a steady decline in the strength and importance of political parties in PNG since the introduction of self-government in 1973. There are a number of ways to measure the salience of political parties in a democracy. One is to look at the internal capacity and resources of parties by examining their membership levels (which, in PNG, are not verifiable and often not



available in the first place); financial resources (ditto); constitutions and policy platforms, and so on. An alternative approach is to look at the number of candidates endorsed at each election — a reliable indicator of party strength in many instances, but potentially misleading in PNG due to some parties endorsing more than one candidate in a seat, and candidates ‘self-endorsing’ by choosing their own party label. The difficulty in obtaining reliable information on most of these issues in PNG is itself a telling indicator of the weakness of the current party system.

A more reliable measure of party strength in most countries is to look at the relative success of parties in the two most important aspects of competitive politics: the results of general elections, and the formation of governments. Both of these are difficult, but not impossible, to assess in PNG. In terms of the results of general elections, the major problem for traditional academic analysis is one of reliable data. Only since the 1987 election have the official election statistics included information on party support levels. Prior to 1987, candidates were not identified by any party affiliation on the ballot paper (although since 1972, photographs have been used on the ballot paper wherever possible to identify the particular candidate for illiterate voters). Once elected, successful members would simply align themselves with their chosen party in parliament. This makes the traditional calculation of the relationship between a party’s vote share and its seat share — a mainstay of most discussions of a party’s electoral support in other jurisdictions — extremely difficult in practice and largely meaningless as a measure of electoral support. Such a calculation makes sense in most Western democracies, where politics is conducted on a national level by mass parties, and media coverage concentrates on key players like the prime minister, who ‘represent’ their party to a national audience. To adopt a similar approach in the case of PNG, where election campaigns are really a series of 109 individual battles in each seat, would be to privilege aggregate data with a significance it does not deserve. National factors, while not irrelevant, are often of extremely limited importance.

Nonetheless, it is possible to look at the relationship between a party’s seat and vote shares for all PNG elections since independence. Prior to independence, the best source for such comparative information is Loveday and Wolfers’ (1976) sophisticated analysis of voting patterns in the first three houses, which provides the best indicators of which elected members were associated with which parties once in parliament. As no party

labels appeared on ballot papers until 1987, information on party affiliations from the 1977 and 1982 elections comes mostly from knowledgeable academics and observers making their own estimates of which candidates were 'associated' with particular parties, and using this figure to calculate a crude estimate of a party's overall vote share.

At the 1977 elections the best information available on the relationship between a party's overall vote share and its share of parliamentary seats comes from Hegarty's overview of the 1977 elections, where "a core of party stalwarts were returned but many incumbents were dumped heavily ... of the 109 winners, 76 had been endorsed by parties or movements" (1983, 9). Hegarty viewed party endorsement as often more "a question of convenience than of commitment to a philosophy, platform or leader", noting that most studies from 1977 "show that parties had very little impact at all on the voter" (1983, 12). A later study by Ralph Premdas revised Hegarty's party endorsement figure upwards, claiming that "the 1977 elections could be accurately described as a contest between the major parties ... nearly half of all candidates were either endorsed by a party or were openly or covertly affiliated to a party. Of the 108 elected parliamentarians, all but 10 had party connexions" (1978, 87). Unfortunately no statistics of a national party vote for the 1977 elections have been published, but it is possible to make some informed estimates for comparative purposes. Using the sample of fifteen studies from Hegarty's edited volume, I have attempted to estimate the overall support levels for the major parties.<sup>20</sup> Considering the distribution and representativeness of these results, a rough estimate of overall support levels at the 1977 election would be something like Pangu 35 percent, PPP 15 percent, United Party 10 percent, Papua Besena 5 percent, Country Party 3 percent, National Party 2 percent, with independents gaining the remaining 30 percent.

By 1982, the situation had changed somewhat, with emerging signs of possible strengthening of the party system. The Pangu Pati maintained its dominance, but two new parties campaigned strongly for regional support: the National Party, which had

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<sup>20</sup> In the four urban seats around Port Moresby, the Papuan nationalist party, Papua Besena, won three seats with an average of 41 percent of the vote; the Pangu Pati won one seat with an average of 28 percent; and the United Party won no seats but gained approximately 16 percent of the vote. Pangu won six of seven seats in the East Sepik region with an average vote share of 40 percent; one seat went to the United Party candidate with 31 percent. Pangu also won six of the nine Eastern Highlands seats, at a vote average of around 35 percent. The PPP gained around 30 percent of the vote in the Southern Highlands and in New Ireland, while the United Party maintained a strong support base in Enga and some other Highlands regions.

been formed as a highlands equivalent of Pangu prior to the 1972 election but came to much greater prominence under the high-profile leadership of Iambakey Okuk; and the Melanesian Alliance, launched in 1980 by Father John Momis and John Kaputin, and which (unlike nearly all its rivals) had an ideological component to its platform in the shape of economic nationalist and ‘Christian-social’ policies. Jackson and Hegarty estimated the total vote share for each party in 1982 as follows: Pangu 34 percent, PPP 10 percent, National Party 10 percent, Melanesian Alliance 9 percent, United Party 7 percent, Ted Diro’s PNG Independent Group 7 percent, others 2 percent, independents 21 percent (1983, 335).

At the 1987 election, the Electoral Commissioner for the first time attempted to identify candidates by their party affiliation wherever possible — a difficult task where some parties endorsed multiple candidates in a single seat or where candidates claimed a party allegiance which was not necessarily shared by the powers-that-be of the party itself. Nonetheless, for the 1987, 1992 and 1997 elections the Electoral Commission has published data on both party allegiance and overall levels of party support. When combined with the estimates of total vote share from the 1977 and 1982 elections, this enables us to compare the percentage of votes gained by each party and by independent candidates, and in most cases their raw vote totals as well, for all PNG elections since independence. It must be emphasised, however, that this type of information can be quite deceptive when attempting to analyse PNG electoral politics, as it can give the impression that some kind of meaningful party system exists, when in reality the data is simply the combined total of each party-endorsed candidate’s vote in each seat tallied up and presented, as far as possible, as some sort of national party vote figure. National factors and candidates’ party allegiance, while not necessarily irrelevant, are often of extremely limited importance. Mindful of this caveat, the following table presents an indication of party seat and vote shares for each election since independence in 1975.

**Table 3.3: Party vote totals and percentages 1977-1997**

PARTY	1977		1982		1987		1992		1997	
	Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%
Pangu	NA	35	NA	34	408082	14.9	294738	9.3	237028	5.3
PPP	NA	15	NA	10	168280	6.4	90465	2.9	288634	6.5
NP	-	2	NA	10	135761	5.0	26303	0.8	16009	0.4
MA	-	-	NA	9	153611	5.6	134903	4.3	81303	1.8
UP	NA	10	NA	7	87243	3.2	2539	0.1	77917	1.8
NatA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	288965	6.5
PP	-	-	NA	2	34636	1.3	-	-	-	-
IG	-	-	NA	7	-	-	-	-	-	-
Country	NA	3	-	-	10743	0.4	18646	0.6	-	-
PB	NA	5	-	-	17122	0.6	-	-	-	-
PDM	-	-	-	-	298715	10.9	247379	7.8	197331	4.4
PAP	-	-	-	-	87836	3.2	147538	4.7	182845	4.1
MIG	-	-	-	-	60922	2.2	-	-	-	-
LNA	-	-	-	-	132001	4.8	68188	2.2	-	-
Others	-	-	-	1	19803	0.7	134972	4.2	351347	7.9
Indep.	-	30	NA	21	1117635	40.9	1994132	63.1	2738520	61.4
TOTAL	NA	100	NA	100	2732390	100	3159803	100	4459899	100

**Note:** some totals add to over 100% due to rounding.

**Source:** 1977: author's estimates as detailed in text; 1982: Jackson and Hegarty 1983; 1987 and 1992: Saffu 1996 (note that Saffu 1996 misstates Pangu's 1992 total as 408802); 1997: Electoral Commissioner 1997.

**Key:** Pangu = Pangu Pati; PPP = Peoples Progress Party; NP = National Party; MA = Melanesian Alliance; NatA = National Alliance; UP = United Party; PP = Papua Party; IG = PNG Independent Group; CP = Country Party; PB = Papua Besena; PDM = Peoples Democratic Movement; PAP = Peoples Action Party; MIG = Morobe Independent Group; LNA = League for National Advancement; Indep. = Independents.

The most striking conclusion from these figures is how dramatically PNG deviates from the precepts of 'Duverger's law' that "the plurality method tends to lead to a two-party system" (Duverger 1984, 35), or more generalised formulations that "the plurality rule corresponds to a low number of parties" (Taagepera and Shugart 1989, 84). Even at the height of 'party strength' in PNG in 1982, PNG had over six 'effective' electoral parties, and their number has risen at the same time as the salience of party has decreased.<sup>21</sup> Not only has PNG never had anything approaching a two-party system, but since its adoption of FPTP electoral laws it seems to be heading in the other direction, towards increasing party system fragmentation and ultimately, perhaps, dissolution.

<sup>21</sup> As measured by the Laakso-Taagepera index (see Laakso and Taagepera 1979).

Since 1986, six parties (Pangu, PDM, PPP, MA, PAP and National) have formed the core of two opposing coalitions in parliament (Saffu 1996, 29). But their importance and influence has been steadily decreasing. In 1987, their combined vote share was 46 percent, winning 73 seats in parliament. By 1992 their share of the vote was down to only 30 percent, while still managing to win 64 parliamentary seats. By 1997, however, these 'core' parties of the political system had become almost irrelevant, winning just 22 percent of the votes and less than half the seats (51) between them. At the same time, other parties have disappeared altogether and new parties arisen: between 1992 and 1997, the League for National Advancement, Papua Party, Papua Besena and others virtually disappeared, while two new parties — the National Alliance and the Peoples National Congress — emerged as potential forces. The ephemeralism of political organisations in PNG is, according to Saffu, "a reminder of a strong tendency to political fragmentation in PNG, as if in imitation of the marked segmentation of PNG social structures" (1996, 31).

#### *Executive instability*

The combination of PNG's fluid multi-party system and its majoritarian political institutions provides a dramatic illustration of a parliament which actually behaves in accordance with the oft-cited but rarely observed doctrine of 'parliamentary supremacy'. This doctrine holds that, in a system of parliamentary government, the executive is responsible to the legislature, and is dependent upon the legislature's support for its continuation in office. The rise of disciplined political parties in the first half of this century (and the widespread acceptance that functioning parties are an essential element of a functioning democracy) has seen this doctrine replaced by a more accurate 'decline of parliaments' thesis in most countries, as disciplined party voting has effectively transferred real control of the executive from the legislature to the party organisation.<sup>22</sup>

In PNG, by contrast, the weakness of political parties and the willingness of elected members to switch from one party to another means that the executive really is beholden to the backbench. The National Parliament is elected for a five-year term, but the government may be removed by a 'constructive' vote of no-confidence and replaced without the need for an election. While in theory early elections can be called by a majority vote of the parliament (or automatically following a successful no-confidence

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<sup>22</sup> See Loewenberg 1971.

vote in the final year before a scheduled election), in practice PNG parliamentary terms are rigidly fixed. The high levels of incumbent rejection noted earlier is also important here: the most recent elections in 1997 saw 52% of PNG's parliamentarians failing to be re-elected, including most of the previous cabinet. This pattern means that the National Parliament is most unlikely to ever voluntarily dissolve itself.

In 1974 the Constitutional Planning Commission recommended that 'constructive' votes of no-confidence (i.e. where an alternative prime minister is nominated) should be constitutionally guaranteed (1974, 7/6). No-confidence motions have since become a feature of PNG parliamentary politics. To date *every* elected government since independence has been deposed on the floor of parliament without reference to an election. The Constitution provides that a no-confidence vote cannot, however, be used to depose a government in the final year of a parliamentary term, and a further constitutional amendment in 1991 extended from six to eighteen months the 'grace' period a new government has from no-confidence votes — effectively leaving the middle two and a half years of any parliamentary term as a potential danger time. Parliamentary sittings thus tend to be minimised in frequency and duration, and much of the legislative program paralysed, during this two and a half year danger period.

Table 3.4 details the changes of executive in PNG since independence.

**Table 3.4: Changes of Prime Minister in PNG, 1975-1997**

Year	Previous Prime Minister	New Prime Minister	Reason for change
1975	-	Michael Somare	Independence
1977	Somare retains Prime Ministership after General Election		
1980	Michael Somare	Julius Chan	No-confidence vote
1982	Julius Chan	Michael Somare	General election
1985	Michael Somare	Paias Wingti	No-confidence vote
1987	Wing retains Prime Ministership after General Election		
1988	Paias Wingti	Rabbie Namaliu	No-confidence vote
1992	Rabbie Namaliu	Paias Wingti	General Election
1994	Paias Wingti	Julius Chan	Judicial decision
1997	Julius Chan	Bill Skate	General Election

Part of this executive instability relates to the way in which parliamentary coalitions are put together by the leading political actors after each general election. The weakness of PNG's party system and the common ideology of almost all participants results in potential leaders engaging in frantic post-election tussles for commitments of loyalty from newly elected members, in the hope of being able to piece together a parliamentary majority. All members, not just the small parties and independents, are targeted as potential allies. Inducements are offered in return for support, and in some cases members are 'locked' in remote resorts or hotel rooms until they have given guarantees of loyalty (hence the usual reference to post-election meetings of potential coalition partners as 'lock-ups'). A 1991 reduction in the period between the return of election writs and the first meeting of parliament from 21 to seven days, intended to reduce tension and instability in the post-election period, has had little apparent impact (Constitutional Planning Commission 1974, 7/6). The requirement that parliament meet within one week of the return of writs did not appear to alter the frantic bargaining for support that has always been a feature of the post-election scene in PNG: Standish reported that following the 1992 election, a period of "intense politicking followed the poll, in which helicopters plucked winners to 'lockups' in isolated resorts before Parliament convened" (1993, 212).

### *Party-hopping*

The extent of post-election 'party-hopping' is another example of the inherent weakness of the PNG party system. A distinctive feature of PNG's parliamentary politics is the willingness of members who stand for office under the endorsement of one party to join another party once elected to parliament — usually in return for a ministry or some other financial inducement. The phenomenon of party hopping, as it is known in PNG, is not unknown elsewhere (there have been several recent examples in Australia, the United Kingdom and other established Westminster systems), but has reached unusually high levels in PNG, where the incidence of MPs changing their party endorsement is so widespread as to seriously undermine executive government. Every post-independence government has been formed and reshaped by 'the numbers game' of MPs changing allegiances:

A great part of the time of the prime minister is spent on managing the coalition, which is constantly threatened by competition for ministerial office among parliamentarians and given wide

rein by the rules whereby a vote of no confidence leads to a change of government and not to the dissolution of parliament. Collective responsibility is difficult to maintain in these circumstances, especially when coalitions are based not on common policies but on an interest in the perks of power. Political stability is constantly threatened, for at the first whisper of a conspiracy towards a vote of no confidence, normal executive and legislative functions are immobilized, as the prime ministers and their rivals go about mustering parliamentary support. Corruption and patronage are the natural results, while the political system becomes discredited (Ghai 1990, 329-30).

Party-hopping is also strongly connected to wider questions of PNG's political culture. There is little opprobrium attached to party-hopping in PNG. Part of the reason for the unusually high level of inter-party mobility is that most constituents expect their member to put local interests before national ones. Oliver has noted that if an MP can improve his chance of becoming a minister, or simply enhances his access to patronage and influence, by joining the government benches, then whatever the element of personal advantage there may be in his action, he is widely seen as acting in the interests of his electoral supporters (1989a, 3). Whether such a member's supporters would always agree with this assessment is another matter!

While party-hopping is by no means restricted to the immediate post-election period, it is usually in this period, when the most intense 'horse-trading' for support takes place, that changes of party allegiance are at their most frantic. This allows us to compare official records of pre-election party allegiance from the Electoral Commission with post-election voting patterns in parliament in order to measure the extent of movement from one party to another with more accuracy during the period from the return of election writs to the first sitting of parliament, when a new prime minister is chosen. Table 3.5 therefore gives an indication of the extent of party hopping in this period for each election since 1977.



**Table 3.5: Party strength at return of election writs and first sitting of parliament  
1977-1997**

	Pangu	PPP	NP	MA	UP	PP	IG	PB	PDM	PAP	MIG	LNA	CP	Oth.	Indep.	Total
<b>1977</b>																
<b>election</b>	38	20	1	-	27	-	-	7	-	-	-	-	1	-	14	108*
<b>parliament</b>	40	20	2	-	24	-	-	6	-	-	-	-	0	5	11	108*
<b>1982</b>																
<b>election</b>	50	14	13	8	9	3	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	108*
<b>parliament</b>	61	13	19	6	6	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	108*
<b>1987</b>																
<b>election</b>	26	5	12	7	1	3	-	-	17	6	4	3	-	-	22	106*
<b>parliament</b>	27	10	10	7	2	3	-	-	26	14	4	3	-	-	-	106*
<b>1992</b>																
<b>election</b>	20	8	2	7	-	-	-	-	15	12	-	4	-	2	39	109
<b>parliament</b>	22	10	2	9	-	-	-	-	15	13	-	5	-	3	30	109
<b>1997</b>																
<b>election</b>	15	16	-	4	3	-	-	-	8	5	-	-	-	22	36	109
<b>parliament</b>	13	16	1	5	3	-	-	-	8	4	-	-	-	23	36	109

\* The election for one seat in 1977 and 1982 and three seats in 1987 were postponed due to the death of candidates during the campaign period.

Source: 1977: Hegarty 1983 and Premdas 1978; 1982: King 1989; 1987: Oliver 1989; 1992: Saffu 1996; 1997: Electoral Commissioner 1997 and *The Independent*, 25 July 1997.

Key: as for Table 3.3.

The phenomenon of party hopping is, like many other aspects of PNG politics, primarily an indication of the weakness of PNG's political institutions, particularly the party system. Party discipline cannot be imposed solely from above. It needs to be representative of an authentic differentiation between opposing political forces if it is to act as a motivating force for party members and political representatives alike. A political sphere in which party-identification factors are largely irrelevant to voting choice is one in which the coherence and stability of parties will be difficult to sustain. Parties have a very specific purpose in most political systems. Like other types of social movements, they are agents for common interests to meet and provide a forum for organised social activity. But unlike social movements, political parties typically have one over-riding defining objective: to have their endorsed members elected to parliament. The prevalence of party-hopping is thus primarily a consequence of the very weakness of PNG parties; and, in one of the frequent catch-22 situations of PNG

politics, each individual act of party-hopping works to further undermine both the influence of existing political parties, and the concept of a party system itself.

### *Turnout levels*

Turnout levels of voters in PNG are higher than those of many established democracies and are often cited as evidence of the health and strongly participatory nature of PNG democracy. Lijphart has argued that “turnout can be regarded as a measure of the quality of the democracy”, and if this is the case then PNG elections are indicative of a healthy democracy (1992, 24). Certainly, turnout levels are a good indication of the level of interest in an election on the part of voters, and of the legitimacy they accord to such an exercise. But they can also be evidence of other factors at work — compulsion, for example. Griffin claims that PNG “has one of the highest voting turnouts in the world” for a voluntary voting system (1997, 76). Examination of the comparative evidence does suggest that, if we look at the level of voter turnout in PNG compared to its eligible population, rather than just the figures based on the electoral roll, then political participation is extremely high at recent elections.

PNG’s first mass-suffrage elections in 1964 attracted a total turnout of 72 percent of enrolled voters, but this figure was undoubtedly boosted by the clear similarity between the mobile electoral patrols and the well-established (and compulsory) census patrols: many electors considered polling merely another prescribed exercise. A number of officials deliberately avoided disabusing electors of the widely-held belief that voting was in fact compulsory. In 1968, the official turnout dropped to 63 percent — still a reasonable level, but again boosted by the near 100 percent turnout field officers extracted in some villages. On the other hand, turnout in most areas fell below the 1964 levels — perhaps because of the growing understanding that voting was voluntary, perhaps also because the promises and unrealistic expectations raised by some candidates at the first elections had not been fulfilled. The official report speaks of voter “disillusionment” and “bewilderment”, with the Chief Electoral Officer warning that the declining turnout could be a trend:

Whatever the reason may be the fact remains that there is a drop in voting of some 10% when comparing the 1964 to the 1968 elections. I would suggest that some serious thought be given to this problem before the 1972 General Election. If steps are not taken to alleviate the present situation I have no hesitation in prognosticating a further drop in voting percentages in 1972 (1968, 31).

Despite predictions to the contrary by the Chief Electoral Officer immediately prior to the 1972 elections<sup>23</sup>, this prognostication proved correct: in 1972 turnout dropped to its lowest level, officially measured at 60 percent (Chief Electoral Officer 1973, 31). But there were considerable discrepancies: the Mt Wilhelm electorate in Chimbu province recorded a turnout of only 32 percent; Poroma-Kutubu in the Southern Highlands achieved a 90 percent turnout. The real differences were along regional lines, with most highlands electorates recording above-average turnout levels, perhaps reflecting “the continued influence of district administration officials in getting voters to the polls”, as well as the higher level of contestation for highlands seats (Stone 1976b, 530). Turnout in much of the rest of the country was recorded to be around the 50 percent mark — indicative, perhaps, of the quality of the electoral rolls as much as any genuine measure of participation.

Turnout since 1972 has become increasingly difficult to measure with any confidence. Figures for the 1977 election put total turnout at between 62 and 68.9 percent — a turnaround from the lows of 1972 (Hegarty 1983, 14; Electoral Commissioner 1987, 5). No election report was ever released after the 1982 elections, which even the Electoral Commission has admitted were hampered by ‘dubious’ electoral rolls which contained massive duplications (1987, 5). No turnout figures have been published by the Electoral Commission for the 1992 election, but the Electoral Commissioner has given a rate of 82.6 percent.<sup>24</sup> The Electoral Commissioner’s report on the 1997 elections estimates turnout at 66 percent, but argues that this figure substantially understates the actual rate due to problems with the electoral roll (1997, 11-12).

As Table 3.6 indicates, these official figures have almost certainly underestimated voter turnout in PNG due to the widespread presence of duplications on the electoral roll. The variation between the official and ‘estimated’ turnout rates for the 1997 election is a case in point: while the official turnout was 66 percent, on the basis of the estimated voting age population voter turnout was an extraordinary 98.7 percent, which suggests strongly that multiple voting is taking place in some areas.<sup>25</sup> The table gives several estimates of turnout at all PNG elections to date. The first column is the year each

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<sup>23</sup> See Stone 1976b, 529.

<sup>24</sup> Interview, Reuben Kailulo, PNG Electoral Commissioner, 23 July 1996.

<sup>25</sup> For which there is certainly evidence from some highlands electorates. See ‘Democracy without taste’, *The Independent*, 25 July 1997.

election has been held. The second column is an estimate of the total voting age population at each election (that is, the total number of persons eligible to enrol). This information was calculated from PNG census data and from United Nations estimates of PNG's population over 18 years of age. The third column is the total number of enrolled voters at each election, as published in the official election reports or, in the case of the 1982 and 1987 figures, as estimated by informed commentators from official sources (Wolfers and Regan 1988, appendix 3). The fourth column is the total number of votes cast at each election, including informal votes, section votes, absentee votes and postal votes.<sup>26</sup> The fifth column is the turnout percentage based on the figures in columns three and four — that is, the total number of votes cast as a straight percentage of the total number of enrolled voters. The sixth column is this same statistic as a percentage of the estimated voting age population. The final column is the official turnout figure published for each election.

**Table 3.6: Voter Turnout in PNG Elections 1964-1997**

Year	Voting age population	Enrolled voters	Total number of votes cast	Turnout as % of enrolled voters	Turnout as % of voting age population	Official turnout (%)
1964	1 113 530	1 028 339	743 489	72.3	66.7	72.3
1968	1 201 200	1 151 119*	734 118 <sup>a</sup>	63.8	61.1	63
1972	1 341 600	1 386 845*	829 963	59.8	61.8	60
1977	1 561 832	1 607 635	970 172	65.6	67.5	68.9
1982	1 757 493	2 309 621	1 194 114	52.0	68.3	66.3
1987	1 820 120	1 843 128	1 355 477	76.0	77.0	72.9
1992	2 038 910	1 987 994	1 614 251	81.2	79.2	81.2
1997	2 272 626**	3 414 072	2 244 531	66.0	98.7	66.0

Source: to 1987: Turner and Hegarty; 1992: Electoral Commissioner 1992; 1997: Electoral Commissioner 1997.

\* The 1968 and 1972 election reports give different enrolment figures for open and regional electorates. This is the open electorate data.

\*\* Estimate by Institute for National Affairs, Port Moresby.

<sup>26</sup> These separate categories were copied into the OLN directly from the Australian electoral law. Prior to its repeal in 1991, section 141 of the OLN enabled qualified electors whose name was omitted from the electoral roll due to official error to make a declaration vote. In practice, this entailed any person who claimed that their names had been erroneously left off the roll swearing to officials that they were over 18 and had lived in the electorate for more than six months. This provision was widely believed to have been abused, especially by under-age electors, with some electorates recording over 50 percent of their total votes as 'section' votes.

If we calculate turnout as a percentage of the total voting age population, which is widely accepted as the most accurate comparative measure (International IDEA 1997, 10), then PNG's average real turnout since independence, at approximately 69 percent (or 81 percent if the 1997 figure is included), is high by world standards. In fact, of Weiner's comparable developing-world democracies of India, Jamaica, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Trinidad and Tobago, PNG has easily the highest turnout rates (International IDEA 1997, *passim*). If these figures are correct, they raise several interesting questions: Why did participation rates dip sharply in 1968 and again in 1972 before recovering for the first post-independence elections in 1977? Why have turnout rates continued to rise since then? And why are participation rates higher in PNG than in many similar countries?

One reason for the trough of turnout levels in 1972 may be a matter of electoral law: in 1971 PNG took the progressive step of reducing the voting age from 21 to 18 years — a reform that predated similar moves in many Western countries. The Chief Electoral Officer estimated that such a move would increase the total number of eligible voters by approximately 225,000 people (1973, 11). It is likely that a large number of these newly eligible electors were unaware of their entitlement to vote, hence depressing overall turnout. The 1972 election report lamented that “young people showed very little interest in the national election” and that their votes “therefore made little difference to the results in key electorates” (1973, 12). Anecdotal evidence also suggests that enrolment (which has always been technically compulsory, even if this has never been enforced) was conducted more effectively and accurately in the early elections.

The explanation behind the increasing and continually high turnout rates since independence is more problematic, especially considering the oft-heard view that the electorate in PNG, as elsewhere, is cynical about the political process. The key would appear to be the clan or *wantok* system which sits at the heart of PNG politics. This social structure facilitates ease of electoral mobilisation: village-based polities provide relatively discrete units of electors which can be mobilised behind chosen candidates. It also results in the phenomenon of ‘block voting’: most electors do not approach voting as free agents, but as members of a clan, and can thus be relied upon to act as a group when it comes to casting their vote. Moreover, the clientelist style of PNG politics,

where voters are offered financial and other inducements by candidates to turn out and vote, provides a very real motivation for electors to be, and to be seen to be, fulfilling their side of the deal. Voting in PNG, as elsewhere in the world, is a social act with often elaborate preludes and postscripts. As in so many other areas of PNG electoral politics, then, institutional and social forces combine to produce unusual results.

But while the social forces stemming from clan-based behaviour and reciprocal obligations are persuasive explanations for a large part of the high turnout rates, they do not tell the whole story. As elsewhere, the first-past-the-post electoral system also plays a strong role: because FPTP enables a candidate with small but localised support levels to triumph over many other candidates with a relatively small percentage of the total vote, mobilisation of one's clan is of crucial importance. Because most electors can be relied upon to act as agents for the clan rather than as 'swinging' voters in their electoral choice, candidates can devote time and resources to mobilisation rather than persuasion. And because FPTP encourages high candidate numbers, it also means that the threshold of victory or defeat in many cases is tiny: 10 or 20 votes can separate winners from losers. Under this scenario, candidates have a great incentive to coerce every possible supporter to turn out on polling day. This phenomenon will be examined in more detail in the following chapter, which turns to the key question of the way the electoral system has influenced political campaigning, and particularly the way different electoral laws have encouraged or discouraged co-operation and accommodation between both candidates and their supporters.

## **Chapter Four:**

### **The effects of electoral systems in Papua New Guinea**

PNG's electoral laws have been strongly influenced by its history of Australian colonialism. As already discussed, one of the abiding influences of colonial rule tends to be the similarity between the institutions of government of the metropolitan power and the institutions of the newly autonomous or independent colony. This tendency is well illustrated by the choice of electoral systems by new, post-colonial democracies since the Second World War: as PNG's Constitutional Planning Commission itself noted, "most colonial territories inherit the voting system found in the countries that have ruled them" (1974, 6/15). Nearly all the former British colonies in the developing world adopted Westminster-style systems of government featuring first-past-the-post electoral systems at independence, just as the former Spanish, Belgian and Dutch colonies initially imitated the PR electoral rules of their colonisers (Lijphart 1977, 186-87). The experience of the two Australian external territories of Papua New Guinea and Nauru<sup>1</sup> was consistent with these trends. As noted earlier, PNG was transferred the 'Australian' electoral system of AV, slightly modified for local conditions<sup>2</sup>, for its first three elections in 1964, 1968 and 1972, before moving to a FPTP system at independence in 1975. The tiny Pacific island micro-state of Nauru, which came under Australian trusteeship following the Second World War, also inherited the Australian system at independence in 1968 but, in a unique departure from Australian practice, combines preferential voting with multi-member constituencies.<sup>3</sup> This means that Australia (since 1918) and its two former colonies — Nauru since 1968 and PNG between 1964-1975 — provide the only national-level applications of AV elections anywhere in the world to date.<sup>4</sup>

Two separate electoral systems have thus been used in Papua New Guinea: AV from 1964-1975, and FPTP from 1975 onwards. While these two systems possess markedly

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<sup>1</sup> For one of the few discussions of politics in Nauru, see Crocombe 1988.

<sup>2</sup> PNG's *Electoral Ordinance 1963* was, for the most part, a direct copy of the Australian *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*, a situation which led to unexpected problems when it was realised that the optional AV system used in PNG was incompatible with the requirement, lifted from the Australian act, that a candidate must receive an absolute majority of all ballot papers, including exhausted ballot papers, to be elected. See Hughes and van der Veur 1965, 412-16.

<sup>3</sup> Preferences are counted as fractions of a vote (i.e. while a first preference is worth one vote, a second preference is counted as half a vote, a third preference as a third of a vote, and so on).

<sup>4</sup> However as detailed in the following Chapter, another South Pacific state, Fiji, will hold its future elections under an AV system.

different institutional incentives, both tend to be classified as ‘majoritarian’ systems in the electoral studies literature. Lijphart, for example, states that AV and FPTP are both “a perfect reflection of majoritarian philosophy: the candidate supported by the largest number of voters wins, and all other voters remain unrepresented” (1984, 150). While indeed similar in many ways, the effects of these two systems in terms of the incentives they provide for accommodative political behaviour are sometimes very different — in fact in some ways they can be seen as polar opposites when applied to a highly-fragmented social and political structure such as that of PNG. This chapter will examine how these two electoral systems have encouraged very different types of election campaigning and political behaviour in PNG.

### **The Alternative Vote in Papua New Guinea**

The introduction of AV to PNG was a straightforward example of a colonial ‘institutional transfer’ described earlier, in which both the metropole and colony were happy to persist with familiar institutions rather than experiment with something new. Hughes noted that the first report of the 1962 Select Committee on Political Development, which was charged with making recommendations on the Territory’s future representative institutions, had favoured AV as “giving the fairest result” (Hughes 1965, 36), declaring that four-fifths of witnesses to the Committee had supported this option. The recommendation was readily accepted by both the colonial administration and the Australian government (Hughes and van der Veur 1965, 406).

AV was first used to elect members of the (largely-appointed) Legislative Council in the early 1960s under what was known as the ‘College Electoral System’. This involved electors physically queuing up behind the candidate of their choice in what the Chief Electoral Officer called a system of ‘open preferential voting’:

If, on a count, no candidate had an absolute majority, i.e. more than half the voters present lined up behind him, then the candidate with the least number of voters behind him moved away and his supporters redistributed themselves amongst other candidates ... this physical act of distributing one’s person to the candidate of one’s choice and, if he be eliminated, to one’s next choice, was simple and understandable in the eyes of the voter (1968, 32).

While simple, such a system ignored the basic precept of the secrecy of the ballot, and was not practical for mass-suffrage elections. PNG’s first three national elections in 1964, 1968 and 1972 were therefore held under the ‘optional preferential vote’ (OPV),



based on the ‘full preferential’ AV method used for federal elections in Australia. Electors were required to express a first preference (defined as the number 1) for a candidate, and as many further preferences (2,3,4 etc) for other candidates as they so chose. In practice, low literacy rates meant that most electors were not capable of independently numbering preferences themselves, so the institution of the ‘whispering ballot’ — electors verbally expressing their preferences to a polling officer, who would mark the ballot paper for them — was extensively used.<sup>5</sup> In a further departure from Australian practice, it was reasoned that it would not be necessary to compel voters to express preferences for all candidates (hence the description of the system as ‘optional preferential’), as a direct imitation of the Australian system would have seen numbering mistakes render a ballot paper invalid — which would have had dramatic ramifications considering PNG’s low literacy rates.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the Australian system of compulsory voting was not introduced “because of the novelty of the elections and the problems of terrain and climate” (Hughes and van der Veur 1965, 406). With those important exceptions, the remainder of the Territory’s *Electoral Ordinance 1963* was a direct copy of the Australian *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*. In no sense was the transfer of AV an example of conscious ‘constitutional engineering’; as Wolfers noted at the time, the principal *raison d’être* for the introduction of the preferential system was that it was the system used in Australia (1969, 29). By 1970, however, official documents were arguing that AV was particularly well-suited to PNG’s fragmented social structure, arguing that if voters

are unable to gather enough votes to have their ‘local’ man elected then their next preference is a man who can adequately represent them in the House because he is literate, articulate and able to move freely throughout the electorate. In addition they feel that such a man would represent all groups without prejudice, something they fear will not happen at this stage if a man is elected from another language group (Electoral Commission of Inquiry into Electoral Procedures 1970).

The adoption of AV in PNG was thus an example of the law of unintended consequences at work: in many ways, the social conditions present there were, as we shall see, almost uniquely well-suited to the use of a system which aggregated fragmented political choices to produce an overall winner. Nonetheless, the complexity of AV was an ongoing source of concern. For the first election in 1964, neither the

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<sup>5</sup> See Wolfers 1968b, 25.

<sup>6</sup> The PNG Electoral Commission supported a move to full preferential voting after the initial first-past-the-post elections in 1977. They argued that the optional nature of preference marking under the OPV system meant that “voting results tend to swing towards that” of first-past-the-post. See PNG Electoral Commission 1983, 78.

electoral system in general nor AV in particular were well understood by electors. Many of the individual chapters in the first PNG election study, *The Papua-New Guinea Elections 1964*, emphasised repeatedly the difficulties of explaining the concepts of representative democracy to an audience unfamiliar with them, including the vagaries of preferential voting. Reay, for example, found that “the bulk of electors never grasped the mechanics of the distribution of preferences and many placed misguided interpretations on orders of preferences” (1965, 151). Nevertheless, in the Minj Open electorate (one of 14 open electorates in the highlands in 1964), electors “were well accustomed to choosing between two alternatives and many compounded sets of such choices to construct their first two preferences” (Reay 1965, 155). As both ‘Open’ and ‘Special’ electorate candidates were listed on the one ballot paper, Reay found that electors used their preferences distribution in an effective but unanticipated way to ensure that both a European and an indigenous candidate were elected:

Many saw the choice to be made as between electing a European and an indigenous candidate to observe and learn from him or electing an indigenous member and a European to advise and instruct him. Only the first two preferences were seen to be crucial, the first preference being cast for the prospective elected member and the second preference being cast to elect a pupil-observer (if the member were a European) or a teacher adviser (if the member were a native) (1965, 155).

Electors were thus assigning preferences without fully understanding that only one candidate could be elected:

The most common expectation was that the native candidate and the European candidate who gained the highest number of first and second preferences should both go to Port Moresby. Some expressed the more precise opinion that the candidate who received the highest number of first preferences should participate in the House of Assembly as member and the candidate receiving the highest number of second preferences should accompany him either as advisor or as pupil-observer (Reay 1965, 177).

Despite these difficulties, Wolfers noted that, in general, “a remarkable proportion of the voters was able to indicate a rational, that is, a rationally ordered, set of preferences” (1966, 79). The use of disciplined preference-seeking campaigning by some candidates made full advantage of this. A number of electoral strategies based on winning preference votes were reported at the 1964 elections, with probably the most successful exponent being the expatriate candidate Bill Bloomfield in the electorate of Kaindi, who emerged as the winner of the seat after the preferences of seven candidates had been distributed. Without a strong local support base or home area, Bloomfield campaigned extensively, translated his speeches into local language and emphasised that if electors did not want to give him their first preference “then give me number two”. It was an

extremely effective strategy which saw him carry a seat that he would have had no chance of winning on first-preferences.<sup>7</sup> Table 4.1 shows the extent of preference swapping with indigenous candidates that Bloomfield achieved in winning the seat.

**Table 4.1: Result of the Count in Kaindi Open Electorate, 1964**

	Sue Kate	Bill Bloo mfield	Anani Manlau	Ninga Yamun	David Iti	Mangi Iom	James Gould	Monbon	Isom Kala	Exhaus- ted*	Total votes
First pref. votes for each candidate	1842	4583	3372	1188	5425	369	254	801	1377	-	19211
254 votes of GOULD transferred	1852	4686	3388	1208	5440	388	Excluded	824	1392	33	19211
388 votes of IOM transferred	1913	4720	3397	1225	5456	Excluded	-	939	1460	101	19211
939 votes of MONBONG transferred	1964	4984	3422	1379	5476	-	-	Excluded	1592	394	19211
1379 votes of YAMUNG transferred	2075	5341	3501	Excluded	5517	-	-	-	1708	997	19211
1780 votes of KALA transferred	2596	5796	3595	-	5793	-	-	-	Excluded	1431	19211
2596 votes of KATE transferred	Excluded	7373	3974	-	6015	-	-	-	-	1849	19211
3974 votes of MAN LAU transferred	-	9007	Excluded	-	6407	-	-	-	-	3797	19211

\* An 'exhausted' vote comprises a ballot where preferences have not or cannot be assigned to a continuing candidate, hence 'exhausting' before the full distribution of preferences.

Source: Chief Electoral Officer 1964b.

While preferences were distributed in the majority of electorates in 1964, the final result was different to that provided by a first-part-the-post system in only five of the 44 electorates: Henganofi, Tari, Kaindi, Markham and South Markham Special. Henganofi provided a classic example of the way the use of preferences by supporters of aligned candidates can overcome a single dominant plurality winner (see Table 4.2). Candidate Bono, with massive support from his own region but negligible support elsewhere, lost to candidate Ugi, situated in the centre of the electorate and attracting a

<sup>7</sup> See Hughes and van der Veur 1965, 409.

less partisan but considerably broader range of support. Ugi was well behind on first preferences, but gained the majority of all other candidate's preferences to win the seat.

**Table 4.2: Allocation of Preferences in Henganofi Open Electorate, 1964**

Candidate	First count	Second count	Third count	Fourth count	Final count
Forapi	787	-	-	-	(787)
Posi	1758	12	-	-	(1770)
Punupa	3708	73	41	-	(3822)
Bono	8028	12	35	224	8299
Ugi	3925	667	1362	3274	9228
Exhausted	-	23	334	324	681

Source: As for Table 4.1.

As Wolfers noted, Ugi's victory was a "quite remarkable" example of the way inter-group preference-swapping could result in the election of a broadly acceptable candidate, and the outcome "was a tribute to the highly rational voting of his supporters, who were able to make a complex system of voting produce the desired result" (1966, 79).

The real significance of these examples of strategic preference swapping was the pointer they give to a characteristic that emerged more strongly in later elections: regional alliances and co-operation between candidates. In the next election in 1968, for example, Parker found alliances for mutual support between two or more candidates in a number of different electorates. These typically involved a Regional candidate, who was usually an expatriate, being linked with one or more Open electorate candidates within the same district. It was a case of mutual advantage, although the Regional candidate "stood to gain more (and in most places did so) from the Open candidates' intimate associations with places away from his 'home area', than they did from his name, his sharing of transport, or his financing of posters" (Parker 1971, 333). Such alliances continue to take place today in some regions. In other cases, such co-operation extended to rival candidates within the same electorate. Parker noted of the 1968 election study that "most chapters give examples of mutual aid amongst candidates in the course of campaigning. The commonest form of this was the sharing of transport and of 'platforms' at election meetings" (1971, 321). In a verdict unlikely to be

repeated today, the field teams at the 1968 elections saw such co-operative campaigning techniques “as an example of a peculiar mildness — compared to the practice in industrial countries — that seemed to characterise electoral competition in New Guinea” (1971, 321)!

Preference-swapping amongst candidates was more prevalent in 1968 than in 1964, with 59 of the 84 elected seats being decided on preferences, including 12 seats which were ultimately won, after preference distribution, by candidates who had not led on the primary count. In Goroka Open, for example, where 16 candidates stood, the system enabled Sabuemei Kofikai, who came third on the primary count, to win on preferences, as “he was clearly the popular compromise — his name figured near the top of almost every ballot paper” (Wolfers 1968b, 29). Wolfers argues that it was highly-contested highlands seats such as this where “the preferential system has the most obvious relevance in that it may assist in forging a compromise among groups of people who would not, initially at least, consider helping an outsider” (1968b, 29). Shrewd candidates found that they could pick up votes by campaigning outside their ‘home’ areas, particularly in areas which fielded no local candidate (a number of non-local candidates were elected to seats in Central Province in this way). In other regions, little or no preference swapping took place — especially in those regions where the candidates themselves (not to mention the electorate) had not grasped the mechanics of a preferential count, such as in most of the Milne Bay electorates (Gostin, Tomasetti and Young 1971, 97, 105). In the ten Western Highlands seats, over half of those who voted cast a single preference — although the rates varied widely between electorates, from 98 percent in Kandep-Tambul to four percent in Jimi (where 76 percent of voters numbered all eight preferences) (Colebatch, Colebatch, Reay and Strathern 1971, 263-64). The most likely explanation for this difference was the variation in official procedures used to elicit preferences from voters, whereby some polling officials (in imitation, perhaps, of Australian practice) directly solicited all preference orderings while others were less insistent (Wolfers 1968b, 29). Official leaflets and radio education programs encouraged voters to fill in all their preferences, but the only explanation for this advice was that it was “for the good of the country”, a rationale that obviously left room for interpretation (Colebatch, Colebatch, Reay and Strathern 1971, 263).

In general, with most voters giving their first preference to their 'home' candidate, second preferences at the 1968 election tended to go to candidates from geographically proximate tribes or, where possible, to expatriate candidates, who were often seen by voters as a better alternative than an indigenous member from another tribe. In the Western Highlands regional seat, for example, 93 percent of votes cast for the most popular indigenous candidate, Philip Wamell, gave their second preference to an expatriate. In most cases, however, candidates' strategy seemed to be to gain as many first preferences as possible from their 'home' area, and then to expand this base as far as possible by soliciting second preferences from the supporters of others with whom they had some form of geographic connection or traditional alliance (Colebatch, Colebatch, Reay and Strathern 1971, 264-69).

The importance of these preference-swapping alliances between candidates is that they were the harbingers of the first forms of organised, co-operative political activity that began to emerge in PNG at the 1968 elections. Thus Parker cites a Pangu alliance between regional and open electorate candidates in Central Province, and similar behaviour on the part of the expatriate-based 'All People's Party' in Madang, as evidence for "the promise of widening political horizons" and increasing political development in PNG (1971, 333). While political parties at this time were little more than "personal associations between individuals who felt they had common political views and aspirations" (Parker 1971, 333), their growth into agents for inter-electorate and (in the case of Pangu at least) inter-regional forces can be attributed, at least in part, to the associative qualities manifest in the type of accommodative campaigning encouraged by the preferential voting system. As will be discussed later, preferential voting systems can encourage the development of political parties by facilitating formal alliances and coalition arrangements sustained at the electoral level by preference exchanges (such as the long-standing coalition arrangement between the Liberal and National parties in Australia).

The last PNG election under AV rules was held in 1972, and accounts of campaigning from that contest provide the most detailed accounts of preference swapping arrangements leading to accommodative behaviour. What stands out in many accounts, according to Saffu, was

how extremely polite and civil candidates were towards one another. Although candidates could afford to be sporting in the pre-independence days when the stakes were not so high, the contribution of the optional preferential system to the avoidance of mudslinging could have been substantial (1996, 34).

In the contest for the Kula Open seat in Milne Bay, for example, candidates in one area “refrained from criticising each other” and instead “often asked for second or third preferences” in a rival’s home area (Leach 1976, 489). The eventual winning candidate, John Fifita, often did not ask for a first preference at all, merely requesting “a second or third vote if the people wanted to vote for others first” — and subsequently received a healthy share of other (eliminated) candidates’ preferences to win the seat (Leach 1976, 487). Also important were candidates’ direct appeals for not just second preference votes, but for third and fourth preferences as well. In highlands areas, humorous requests for these were made in the idiom derived from the distribution of pork and pigs at festivals whenever a candidate appeared outside his immediate area of strength:

‘I just want to know if you will give me a little piece of backbone and skin’, they would say, and were duly assured that this would be forthcoming, i.e. that either second or third preferences would be given to them (Leach 1976, 277).

A good example of disciplined preference swapping arrangements between hostile groups comes from Strathern’s (1976) account of the contest for the Dei Open Electorate in 1972. Dei Open was a new electorate in the Western Highlands which had been created in 1972 after tribal fighting in the former electorates became a problem. Despite inter-tribal violence immediately before the election, most candidates enunciated “a simple dogma of homogeneity and equality among all those standing” (Strathern 1976, 265), and this moderate philosophy, so different from the fiery rhetoric of modern contests, was reflected in formal preference-swapping arrangements entered into by rival tribes in the electorate (Kombukala, Minembi and Tipuka being the dominant tribes). Strathern sets out the negotiations for this process in some detail:

First, leaders of one tribe (Kombukala) were said to have held a meeting to select their own candidate, and to have invited a small number of Minembi leaders and possibly one or two Tipuka men with whom they had connections. Beer was offered to the guests, and the Minembi and Kombukala leaders agreed that their two candidates could exchange preferences ... Realising that they could take only marginal gains from one another’s areas of support, candidates ... carefully canvassed resettlement blocks and plantations within Dei, hoping to obtain the edge over rivals by securing votes from outsiders (Enga, Chimbu and Southern Highlands people) resident and working in these (1976, 276).

The accommodative incentives of AV are well illustrated by this account, in which previously hostile tribal leaders sat down and negotiated with each other for preference

support. Even where the likely gains from preference swapping were only marginal, candidates nevertheless took the time to meet and discuss ways of harnessing this potential advantage. This process also worked in reverse, with dispossessed groups wooing potentially friendly candidates. The eventual winning candidate, Parua Kuri of the Tipuka tribe, was even entertained with teas and scones by residents of one resettlement block, who promised him their first preference votes (Strathern 1976, 276)! Kuri engaged in the most widespread and accommodative campaigning of any candidate, reaching further into more tribes than any of his competitors. Significantly, he also forged close connections with a traditional ally tribe via “intensive ties of ceremonial exchange” and, in a further example of rational preference-swapping, urged his supporters to cast their preferences for a member of a hostile rival tribe, Warike Wama, as well as for himself. Not surprisingly, when Wama was eliminated at the final count, a healthy proportion of his preferences went to Kuri himself, who won the seat on preferences. What Strathern typified as Kuri’s “growing importance in widening spheres of politics”, by which he “clearly united in himself the figures of traditional big-man and modern politician”, was facilitated by an electoral system that was able to reflect the complexity of both traditional and modern alliances, and enabled him to succeed by utilising tactics which emphasised negotiation and co-operation (1976, 277-83).

One of the most striking features of the 1972 elections is the extent to which AV was utilised by candidates who established broad, cross-tribal support bases to defeat opponents who would have easily won a FPTP contest. For example, Kuabaal’s description of candidates’ campaigns in 1972 in the Sinasina Open Electorate, a Chimbu electorate with seven major tribal groups each speaking a different dialect, noted that the eventual winning candidate concentrated his early campaigning in areas where he had *no* traditional alliance or denominational ties, and in fact gained 41 percent of his primary votes from such areas (1976, 350-72). The predominance of such strategies in the highlands, the site of the most fluid, aggressive and competitive traditional societies, was particularly marked. Table 4.3 sets out the electorates in which preference distribution ensured that the dominant plurality winner did not win the seat in 1964, 1968 and 1972. Despite making up only 32 percent of all seats in 1972, 56 percent of non-plurality winners came from highlands electorates — i.e. those in Chimbu or the Eastern, Southern or Western Highlands districts. As will be detailed below, since 1975



it has been these highlands provinces, where modern electoral contests are most highly contested and violent, and in which minority victories have been most prevalent and electoral violence most extreme under FPTP.

**Table 4.3: Cases where leading candidate on first preferences was defeated after distribution of preferences, 1964-1972**

Year	No of cases	Electorates involved	Percentage of all elected seats
1964	5	Kaindi, Henganofi, Tari, Markham, South Markham Special	9
1968	12	Central Regional, Finschhafen, Goilala, Goroka, Gumine, Ialibu, Kandep-Tambul, Kerowagi, Nawae, Sinasina, Sohe, Tari	14
1972	16	Bulolo, Hagen, Henganofi, Ialibu-Pangia, Kandrian-Gloucester, Koroba-Kopiago, Kundiawa, Lagaip, Lufa, Nawae, Nipa, North Fly, Okapa, Poroma-Kutubu, Sinasina, Tambul-Nebilyer	16

Source: Chief Electoral Officer (1964, 1968, 1972).

While one would expect the highlands to figure prominently in terms of overall preference distribution because of the high numbers of candidates and numerous clan support bases, it is less predictable that so many highlands candidates were able to win seats on the basis of preference support which they would have lost under FPTP. The strength of traditional ties rather than some form of party or policy-based affiliation is often the best explanation for their victories. For example, in Paypool’s account of the campaign in Ialibu-Pangia, an open electorate in the Southern Highlands, the two most prominent candidates, Turi Wari and Koke Itua, who came from different regions of the electorate, Ialibu and Pangia, collaborated closely during the campaign, with each campaigning for the other in his ‘home’ area. Voters from the two areas invariably gave their first preference to their clan candidate, but on the (relatively rare) occasions they decided to express preferences for a candidate from the rival area, they almost invariably chose Turi or Koke — the former winning the seat after eight counts, with Koke coming second (Paypool 1976, 288-90). Similar practices were followed by two young challengers to Tei Abal in the Wabag Open electorate who “campaign[ed] hard on a common policy” and “shared their preferences” (Iangalio 1976, 302-3). In the campaign for the Chimbu Regional seat in 1972, candidates with similar religious affiliations swapped preferences, and traditional allegiances appeared to take precedence over party connections. Like the campaign in Dei Open, however, the candidate with the most widespread support base won the seat (Standish 1976, 326, 345-46). The

important point here is that where accommodative behaviour is rewarded, traditional allegiances can be utilised in much the same way as more modern, policy-based connections.

Of course, just as there were many cases where preference swapping deals were instituted, there was also a considerable number of successful candidates who, judging that they would have majority support on first preferences, instructed their supporters to mark a '1' only. Sometimes this was because they felt that preference instructions would confuse their supporters; sometimes it was because they were confident of winning the seat outright.<sup>8</sup> Often, this assumption proved to be a miscalculation: assurances of support are easy to give, but not always reliable in the exchange-focused environment of PNG electoral politics, in which bloc votes are commodities to be exchanged, bought or sold. The dangers of candidates instructing their supporters to mark only a first preference were graphically illustrated in the contest for the Central Regional seat in 1968, where Andy Anderson, one of two collaborating expatriate candidates, had "deliberately and persistently instructed" his Goilala supporters not to allocate any preferences beyond their first, "fearing that the preferential system might confuse them and cause them to lodge informal votes". When Anderson was eliminated his running mate, Ron Slaughter, gained few preferences, allowing an indigenous candidate to win the seat instead (Groves, Hamilton and McArthur 1971, 309). Similarly, in the Manus Open contest in 1972, lack of a preference swapping strategy almost turned a sure victory against an ageing incumbent candidate into a loss: a group of younger candidates "were unable or unwilling to work together and, failing to appreciate how the preferential system could be exploited to achieve their objective, might well have failed" (Stone 1976b, 535). In the Regional seat, by contrast, the eventual winning candidate was the only one to campaign for second preferences — of which he received the lion's share, winning on the third count (Pokawin 1976, 412-13).

All of these examples illustrate the way rational candidates were able to use the mechanics of preferential voting to improve their chances of success by reaching out to voters from other clan or tribal groups. To do this, they had to overcome not just traditional enmities, but also the novelty of asking for support from areas in which they had little prior profile. Possibly the most important strategy to gain preference votes

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Pokawin 1976, 413.

was the need to travel from village to village, being seen by all the different clans and tribes in an electorate. Anthony Voutas claimed that walking from village to village was the most crucial single factor in his 1968 election victory, writing that “in areas where there was no ‘favourite son’ candidate, I gained heavily. Where there was a ‘favourite son’ candidate, I generally gained second or third preferences” (1970, 499). Similarly, the successful candidate in the Chimbu Regional contest, Iambakey Okuk, spent almost two years driving around his electorate prior to the 1972 election (Standish 1976, 326). Such accommodative practices are virtually unimaginable in many areas of PNG today, where it is both dangerous and a waste of valuable resources to campaign outside one’s immediate ‘home’ areas (Standish 1994, 60).

It is significant to note that despite problems of literacy and numeracy, the percentage of voters in PNG utilising preferences increased with every election between 1964 and the last AV election in 1972. In addition, the incidence of preferences deciding outcomes increased over time. At the 1964 elections, while preferences were distributed in the great majority of electorates the final result was different to that provided by FPTP in only five of the 44 electorates. In 1968, due to the distribution of preferences, twelve electorates (out of a total of 84) returned results different to straight plurality contest. By 1972, preferences changed the result in 16 out of 100 elected seats — in other words, 16 percent of seats returned different members than would have been the case under FPTP.<sup>9</sup> This was a higher rate of results being changed than has ever been achieved in national elections in Australia, the ‘home’ of AV, and probably reflects the increasing recognition in PNG of the utility of preference allocation as a means of defeating candidates with strong but localised support in favour of a more widely acceptable candidate. Table 4.4 compares the experience of the two countries.

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<sup>9</sup> The CPC mistakenly mistakenly stated that in 1972 “in only 13 electorates was the candidate who led on the first count defeated after preferences had been distributed”. In addition to being incorrect, the use of the word ‘only’ appeared to imply that this was a relatively small amount, when it in fact represents the highest rate of results being changed of *any* national AV election. See CPC 1974, 6/15-6/16.

**Table 4.4: Proportion of seats where preferences distributed and outcomes changed in Australia and Papua New Guinea, 1963-1996**

AUSTRALIA			PAPUA NEW GUINEA		
Election Year	Preferences distributed (%)	Outcomes changed (%)	Election Year	Preferences distributed (%)	Outcomes changed (%)
1963	19.2	6.6	1964	52.3	11.4
1966	25.0	4.0	1968	73.8	9.2
1969	32.0	9.6	1972	69.0	16.0
1972	39.2	11.2	-	-	-
1974	26.0	7.9	-	-	-
1975	18.9	5.5	-	-	-
1977	36.2	3.1	-	-	-
1980	32.0	4.8	-	-	-
1983	24.8	1.6	-	-	-
1984	29.7	8.8	-	-	-
1987	36.5	2.7	-	-	-
1990	60.1	6.1	-	-	-
1993	42.2	8.2	-	-	-
1996	39.2	4.7	-	-	-

Source: As for Table 4.3, plus Hughes 1997, 166-67.

While examples of accommodative campaigning from the pre-independence era are relatively common, it appears that few commentators specifically attributed this behaviour to the incentives presented by the electoral system. Of the numerous studies, mostly by Australian authors, detailing the period leading up to independence, only Ballard noted the fact that AV “encouraged collaboration among candidates within an electorate” (1978, 11). More recent calls in PNG for the re-introduction of preferential voting have, however, implicitly endorsed the argument that preferential voting encourages inter-group accommodation, although not always in the policy-concession manner that Horowitz anticipated. These arguments will be examined in detail later in this chapter. First, however, the effects of FPTP upon political behaviour in PNG will be examined.

### **First-past-the-post in Papua New Guinea**

#### *The introduction of first-past-the-post*

PNG abandoned AV for FPTP in 1975, on the grounds that it was excessively complicated and, as a system introduced by the Australian administration, a colonial

institution unsuited to PNG's needs. Other concerns focused on the potentially lengthy time taken to achieve a result, leading to increased tension and disputation. By contrast, FPTP was seen as being a simpler system which, in most cases, would deliver the same results as AV anyway (Ballard 1978, 11). Concerns about the suitability of the inherited AV system had surfaced following the 1968 election, with the Chief Electoral Officer writing that the "strongest argument against the preferential system is its complexity for the average voter and its complexity for the count ... much has been said in this election of the merits of the 'first past the post system' and how simple it is to operate". In a prescient remark, he also noted that FPTP in the (then) British Solomon Islands had resulted in one particular candidate being elected with 388 votes out of an electorate of 10,000 voters (1968, 32-33)! The United Nations Visiting Mission stated that "while there were drawbacks in the preferential system it felt bound to acknowledge that it is probably the best system to use in the circumstances prevailing in the Territory" (1968, 68).<sup>10</sup> However opposition to preferential voting was growing amongst a small but influential band of commentators. Writing in January 1968, Wolfers claimed that the 'optional' nature of preference marking under AV in PNG had "deceived" electors in the past — and that voters in two by-elections in 1965 and 1967 had accordingly "indicated far fewer preferences than in 1964". He wrote:

a preferential system in which it is not compulsory to number all squares (as it is in Australia) may produce an almost random result: if it fails to produce a result identical with that which would result from a first-past-the-post vote, it can produce any of a variety of results, depending simply on how soon the supporters of the candidates first eliminated tire of indicating their preferences. Is it any wonder that some candidates are urging their supporters to indicate only a first preference? (1968a, 70)

Support for a change to first-past-the-post gained momentum following the 1972 elections. Several observers had previously argued that AV, because of its complexity, discouraged electors from voting and promoted invalid ballots (Colebatch, Colebatch, Reay and Strathern 1971, 226, 261-64; Parker 1971, 352). Without openly supporting a new electoral system, the Chief Electoral Officer, Simon Kaumi, writing under the heading "Preferential system versus first-past-the-post", made it clear that the complexity of AV was causing difficulties:

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<sup>10</sup> The Mission went on to make the quite impractical recommendation that a minimum of four preferences should be expressed on all ballots where there were four or more candidates in future elections, a provision which was not adopted, as it would have resulted in a large number of votes being rendered informal.

The preferential system is no doubt a fairer system than the first-past-the-post system but, while appreciating its fairness, it is becoming more and more complicated as well as time consuming. Papua New Guinea's electoral system must be completely revised with a view to making it simple and less complicated so that it is easily understood by both polling officials and the voters. As the country approaches self-government, Papua New Guinea's electoral system must be simplified ... I feel it is time Papua New Guinea looked realistically and critically at its voting system and made its own decisions as to what is suitable for its future democratic needs. The question is not one of democracy, rather one of finding a voting system that is simple and suitable to the people of this country (1973, 18).

These words clearly influenced the Constitutional Planning Committee, and were quoted approvingly in the CPC's final report in 1974. Stating that "we fully agree with this view", the CPC endorsed the suggestion that AV was unnecessarily complicated, and that FPTP would be "easier to understand, easier to run, and the results [would] become known much more quickly. For these reasons, we recommend a change to the 'first-past-the-post' system" (1974, 6/15-6/16). The CPC considered other methods of election, such as proportional representation, to be excessively complicated and only suited to countries with a well-developed party system (1974, 6/15). The Constituent Assembly charged with enacting the independence constitution accepted the CPC's recommendation, and the resulting *Organic Law on National Elections*, which has laid down the framework for all elections since 1977, provides for a FPTP electoral system.

The consequences of the new system were immediately apparent at the 1977 general election. Setting the pattern for all elections since then, a disturbingly high number of seats (42 — almost half the Parliament) were won by candidates with less than 30 percent of the vote, and the related factor of 'vote splitting' — friendly candidates with little hope of winning the seat standing in order to 'split' an opposition block vote — first became a factor.<sup>11</sup> Hegarty noted that vote-splitting tactics in 1977

heightened tension between clans and groups and in some cases polarized electorates to the point of violent conflict ... this situation contrasted markedly with campaigning styles in previous elections where opposing candidates often toured their electorates together urging voters to cast preferences (1983, 15).

Hegarty went on to suggest that "a continuation of such aggressive campaigning in future elections could well weaken the credibility of the electoral system" (1983, 15). Similarly, Premdas described the results of PNG's first FPTP election as "a great disappointment", arguing that

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<sup>11</sup> For an illuminating discussion of the importance of vote (or issue) 'splitting' as a central political tactic throughout the ages, see Riker 1986.

Not only did informal voting not decrease, but much more 85% of the candidates won their seats with less than a majority of votes. Strikingly, about 45% of the victorious candidates won with 30% or less. The immediate implications of the experiment with the first-past-the-post system have been twofold. First, the new electoral system encouraged candidates with the largest bloc of ethnic (clan) votes in an electorate to concentrate on his/her base alone rather than to seek co-operative exchanges for second or third preferences with candidates from other clans. The first-past-the-post system imposed a clear-cut choice that provided no alternative to villagers but to express their choice in a 'friendly' versus 'antagonistic' pattern. In effect the first-past-the-post system did not encourage inter-clan and inter-community co-operation in a country which is notoriously socially and ethnically fragmented. Secondly, the first-past-the-post system diminishes the legitimacy of the parliament as the decision-making body for the national government ... it may very well be dumped for the next national elections (1978, 79-80).

Even the Electoral Commission, which had supported the change, appeared to have doubts about the new system. Echoing Wolfers' earlier criticisms, the Electoral Commissioner, J.S. Mileng, expressed support for a change to a *full* preferential system as "a fairer system of voting" and suggested that the problem with the old AV system was that "the voter is not required to mark his/her full support for the running candidates, therefore the voting system tends to swing towards that of the 'First Past the Post' Voting System". While FPTP was simpler and easier to administer than AV, it did not enable voters "to consider placing a second choice for the next best candidate ... a strong voting block always has the chance of electing its candidate outright, whilst candidates coming from a minority group would have no chance of getting elected" (PNG Electoral Commission 1983, 78-79). Similar criticisms were voiced by a number of other electoral officials, who claimed that FPTP facilitated voting blocks and enabled candidates with small localised support to triumph over their competitors. The following comment, from the Obura-Wonenara returning officer, was typical:

The first-past-the-post system was again criticised by the electors as well as the officials because it does not allow an elector to express his second and third choice for the remaining candidates. With the voting trends in the area, a heavy block tends to vote for its own man leaving no opportunity for a man from a less developed area (PNG Electoral Commission 1983, 78-79).

The relatively new phenomenon of campaign violence in 1977 was a recurring concern, with the Electoral Commission saying that the 1977 poll featured "the most hectic and wild campaign activities that were ever seen in Papua New Guinea". Returning officers in Chimbu and Enga provinces stated that tribal fighting and attacks on polling staff were so widespread as to constitute a serious problem for electoral officials, and both returning officers' reports stated that officials would not perform the same duties again due to the level of violence encountered (PNG Electoral Commission 1983, 88).

### *The effects of first-past-the-post*

As noted earlier, elections in PNG evidence both continuity and change since 1964. However, in some areas the changes in PNG electoral politics appear to be directly related to the institutional consequences of the change of electoral system. Specifically, the introduction of FPTP in 1975 appears to be related to three characteristics of post-independence electoral politics in PNG: the increasingly high rates of candidature at elections; the election of increasingly unrepresentative and minimally-supported candidates; and rising levels of electoral violence. The relationship of the electoral system to these factors will now be examined, and it will be argued that each of these distinguishing characteristics of contemporary PNG politics is at least partly explicable by reference to the incentives for behaviour presented by the electoral system.

#### Candidature rates

PNG elections have long been characterised by remarkably high rates of candidature. The first post-independence elections in 1977 saw an explosion in candidates numbers — 881 candidates standing for 109 seats, representing a 44 percent increase over the number contesting in 1972 and a 33 percent increase in the average number of candidates per seat. Hegarty argued that the increase was “largely due to the fact that, with independence, political power was at stake, and the fact that the first-past-the-post voting system gave candidates with a reasonably strong clan vote a chance of winning” (Hegarty 1983, 13). As detailed in Table 4.5 below, rates of candidature have remained high, and increased, with every election to date.

**Table 4.5: Candidates per Electorate 1964-1997**

Year	No of Electorates	No. of Candidates	Average per electorate
1964	54	298	5.5
1968	84	484	5.8
1972	100	611	6.1
1977	109	879	8.1
1982	109	1125	10.3
1987	109	1513	13.9
1992	109	1654	15.2
1997	109	2370	21.7



Since independence, the increasing centrality of the state as a means of accessing resources and accumulating and distributing wealth has served to encourage more and more candidates to stand for election. As noted in the previous chapter, electoral victory provides the surest way of gaining access to the resources of the state itself. Some observers also argue that standing for election itself increases individual prestige regardless of the election outcome. In the Chimbu region of the highlands, for example, candidature

demonstrates local popularity, makes a 'big man', [and] shows how the candidate measures up against local rivals for clan and tribe leadership. In this competition, candidacy itself, having one's name on the ballot, posters, cars, supporters, is an indication of being a big man. Secondly, success is measured by obtaining votes of the subclan, clan and tribe. Electoral success, that is, achieving office, against thirty or forty rivals, cannot be expected. In the local contest the one who receives the largest number of votes demonstrates that he has at least a local following (Brown 1989, 251).

What is sometimes overlooked in such analyses is the way PNG's FPTP electoral system also encourages candidates to stand for election. The higher the number of candidates standing under FPTP, the smaller the total vote needed to gain a plurality and hence win the seat. For example, if 20 candidates with identical support bases stand for a seat, the winning candidate needs only  $(100 \text{ percent} \div 20 + 1)$ , or just over 5 percent of the vote to be elected. In most countries with disciplined party systems, this example would seem ludicrous: two or three major parties would gain the vast majority of the votes, and the winning candidate would thus need considerably more than 5 percent to gain election. In PNG, by contrast, this type of scenario is relatively commonplace. Because many candidates rely, sometimes exclusively, on their own clan base for support, FPTP contests in electorates with many different clan groups of roughly equal size can produce winning candidates with only a marginal plurality of votes over other candidates. By contrast, other voting systems such as AV require successful candidates to gain an absolute majority of votes cast, and thus encourage alliances between parties or candidates, since the allies can each put up candidates without fear of splitting their combined vote.

The explosion in the number of candidates since independence was clearly not anticipated by the Constitutional Planning Commission and other influential players who supported a change to FPTP. The number of candidates almost doubled in the ten years between 1972 (the last AV election) and 1982, prompting the General Constitutional Commission (which was established in 1978 to review the workings of

PNG's independence Constitution) to suggest that, while FPTP was easier to understand, the desirability of a return to AV warranted consideration should the country's changing circumstances require it (1983, 131). The explosion of candidate numbers in the post-independence era in PNG has many causes, but one of them appears to be the possibility anyone with a modicum of clan support to stand for election and have at least a chance of winning a seat under the FPTP electoral system.

As in so many other areas of PNG politics, regional factors also appear to influence the distribution of this phenomenon. As already noted, in regions of high contestation such as the highlands, where many similar-sized clans vie to have 'their' candidate elected, high candidacy rates are always to be expected. In most elections, the record number of candidates for an electorate tends to occur in highlands seats — 48 in Sinasina-Yonggamugl in 1992, 45 in Kerowagi in 1987 and 29 in Kundiawa in 1982 — although the latest record of 61 candidates contesting one seat occurred in Papua's Northern Provincial electorate in 1997. The areas of high candidature are those in which a number of competing interest groups and issue dimensions are present, such as the National Capital District seats, which have consistently attracted large numbers of able candidates.<sup>12</sup> By contrast, many contests in the lowlands and islands are characterised by small numbers of candidates and a more consensual, measured style of campaigning.

This raises the question of to what extent the number of clans in each electoral district is related to the total number of candidates standing for election. If we assume that there is roughly one candidate for each politicised clan or tribal group, then the number of candidates in an electorate should approximate the number of clans within that constituency. But there are several problems with this approach. First, the number of candidates standing for election has tripled since independence, suggesting a more fluid relationship between the two variables than a straight one-to-one ratio would imply. Also, there is clear evidence of social forces which both deter candidacy in some areas (thus reducing the candidate/clan ratio) and which encourage frivolous or 'vote-splitting' candidates standing in others (thus increasing it). Burton found both of these tendencies taking place in his survey of the Hagen Open electorate in 1987, although the strength of the forces constraining candidacy (such as pre-election agreements by clan leaders on candidacy to avoid vote-splitting) appeared to be outweighed by those

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<sup>12</sup> See Griffin 1988.

encouraging it (the accurate assessment by many candidates with a modicum of support that they have a chance of success) (1989, 272-73). Partly this is also the result of the willingness of parties in PNG to endorse multiple candidates and to generally align themselves with as many likely winners as possible. May's analysis of the 1982 elections in East Sepik, for example, found that parties had little control over candidates from different support bases standing and claiming party allegiance at the time of nomination — a phenomenon which, he argued, split the pro-Pangu vote (1989, 227). Pokawin found a similar situation in Manus, where *every* candidate voluntarily associated themselves with a political party, and no less than nine non-endorsed candidates publicly associated themselves with the Pangu Pati (1989, 245).

Overall, however, the hypothesised relationship between candidature, clan numbers and electoral rules would appear to offer one explanation for PNG's extremely high candidacy rates, as there is a clear relationship between areas of greater group fragmentation with higher rates of candidature. This corresponds to the theoretical expectations of the political science literature, which argues that the effective number of electoral candidates and parties in an election is a product of the interaction between social heterogeneity and electoral rules.<sup>13</sup> Examination of the electoral impact of racial diversity in some areas of the United States, for example, has found that “the greater the level of racial (or social) heterogeneity in an electoral district (or nation), the greater the number of effective candidates there will be in the district (or national) elections” (Jones 1997, 355). When applied to PNG, this theory would predict that the number of candidates per district would be higher in the more competitive and ethnically-diverse areas, such as the Port Moresby electorates and the highlands, than in the less divided islands region — which is indeed the case. At the 1997 elections, for example, the islands region had an average of 10.6 candidates per electorate, while candidature rates were twice as high in the highlands and over three times as high in the National Capital District (Electoral Commissioner 1997, 15).

Although high candidacy is one indicator of democratic participation, in PNG it has come to be seen as “excessive and undesirable both from the point of view of effective representation and the electoral process itself” (Electoral Commissioner 1987, 5). In 1991 the government introduced a number of measures intended to reduce the number

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<sup>13</sup> See Ordeshook and Shvetsova 1994; Amorim Neto and Cox 1997.

of candidates contesting seats “so that the intending candidates will think seriously about contesting and will not be used to split the votes” (‘A Profile on the Electoral Commission of Papua New Guinea - Summary of Changes’, *Post-Courier*, 24 March 1992). The nomination fee for prospective candidates, which had remained at 100 kina since 1975, was increased tenfold to 1000 kina (then about \$A1200), making it one of the highest financial hurdles to contesting elections in place anywhere in the world. Only the winning candidate would have this amount refunded, all losers would forfeit their fee. Candidates now needed the support of 100 enrolled voters from their electorate before they could nominate, and the period in which nominations could take place was sharply reduced to five days.<sup>14</sup> The Electoral Commission did not try to hide the fact that the new provisions were aimed squarely at reducing candidate numbers:

Both national and provincial elections have been characterised by a very large number of candidates, and the numbers are increasing with each election ... While the right to stand for elective office is accepted in principle it is contended that the restrictions proposed are reasonable and are overall in the public interest, in that they will only deter the ‘no-hope’ candidates and will reduce the confusion of voters (N.d.a, 8).

As Table 4.5 makes clear, these measures have been a failure. The tradition of ‘zestful participatory democracy’<sup>15</sup> continued in both 1992 and 1997. The best that can be said is that the growth in the number of candidates in 1992 was slowed somewhat, but still increased — to 1655 candidates. The 1997 election saw a record 2371 candidates standing for election — an increase of 43.4 percent on the 1992 figure. Saffu argues that what he sees as the two “fundamental features of Papua New Guinea elections” — the relative unimportance of political parties in the electoral process and the essentially local character of electoral politics — are both strongly related to the increasing levels of candidates standing for election (1996, 41). In such an analysis, institutional factors such as the electoral system have relatively little impact. Saffu argues that if AV were re-introduced, it would probably be adaptively domesticated by the use of ‘sponsoring strategies’ rather than ‘splitting strategies’, so that its direct impact upon the number of candidates standing would be reduced. Nonetheless, he says, “the fundamental problem

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<sup>14</sup> However, the provisions concerning nomination fee refunds were later overturned by the Supreme Court as being in breach of the PNG Constitution, while a drafting error meant that the reduction in the nomination period was not validly legislated. A further change, providing for the introduction of a Voter Identification Card, was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. See Kaiulo 1993.

<sup>15</sup> The phrase is Jim Griffin's.

that has to be addressed by any electoral reform in PNG is the large number of candidates in PNG elections” (1996, 34-35).

### Minimal vote shares

One consequence of very high levels of candidature under a FPTP system is that many successful candidates will be elected on only a small plurality of votes, often well short of a majority. The 1992 results give a good indication of the relationship between the number of candidates and the vote share necessary to win the seat — Sinasina-Yonggamugl Open, with the highest number of candidates, required the lowest winning vote share of only 6.3 percent; while in Namatanai Open, with only two candidates, Sir Julius Chan scored 58.5 percent, the highest of any seat. There is no strict causal relationship between candidacy levels and a winning candidate’s vote share: each tends to encourage the other. The understanding that so few votes are needed to gain a place in the national parliament itself encourages candidature from those who would otherwise not consider standing, the higher candidature levels means that fewer votes than ever are needed to gain a plurality, and on it goes.

As noted earlier, under a FPTP system and assuming more or less equal support bases, the more candidates standing for election, the smaller the total vote share needed to win the seat. The Electoral Commissioner claims that this means that

the representativeness or otherwise of many MPs could be called into question by their own electors. More and more candidates are winning with fewer and fewer percentages (*sic*) and with smaller and smaller margins over the runners-up. This year only 14 candidates (12.8%), compared with 22 in 1992 (20.2%), won with 30 per cent or more of the formal votes cast in their electorates. At the other end of the scale, the number of candidates winning with less than 10 per cent of the formal votes cast rose from 9 in 1992 (8.2%) to 15 this year (13.8%), with three winning candidates obtaining less than seven per cent of the votes (1997, 13-14).

As Table 4.6 indicates, the 1997 election continued the trend, apparent since independence, of increasing numbers of successful candidates being elected with minority support.

**Table 4.6: Percentage of votes gained by successful candidates 1977-1997**

Year	No of seats	Percentage of formal votes gained by winners					
		< 10%	10-19%	20-29%	30-39%	40-49%	>50%
1977	109	-	11	37	26	16	19
1982	109	4	20	33	20	14	18
1987	106	2	39	41	13	4	7
1992	108	9	45	33	14	3	5
1997	107	15	47	31	8	2	4

Source: Electoral Commissioner 1997; Electoral Commissioner 1987.

These figures show a clear increase in minority victories at each election since 1977. Winning members supported by an absolute majority of voters have declined from 19 in 1977 to just four in 1997. While only 11 members won with less than 20 percent of the vote in 1977, by 1997 only 45 elected members could gain *more* than this level of support. However, the figure of most immediate concern in 1997 was the 15 MPs elected with less than 10 percent of the vote. As in previous elections, most of these candidates were independents from the highlands, where inter-clan fragmentation and competition is most prevalent and the inclusive and accommodative candidacy which was a feature of AV elections is now virtually unknown. Recent elections in PNG have seen a high incidence of 'dummy' candidates being encouraged (and sometimes paid) to stand for a seat in order to split a strong block vote from an opposing clan (Dorney 1990, 59). By enabling a candidate with a very small support base to entertain hopes of winning, and by rewarding the placing of 'dummy' candidates and other vote splitting devices (such as paying the nomination fees or electoral expenses of a friendly candidate from a different grouping in order to divide an opposition clan's block vote), FPTP can reward tactics which undermine the legitimacy of the electoral process, and militate against electoral alliances.

While this pattern is now widespread, it is not universal. Burton has pointed to the example of tribal groups in the Mt Hagen area who negotiate candidature between themselves a year or more before the elections, ensuring both that candidate numbers are minimised and that clan groups deliver their 'block' votes to one or the other candidates well before the election date. Some clans agree not to put up candidates so

as not to split a vote; others agree to support a particular candidate.<sup>16</sup> In this way, a form of vote pooling takes place before the election. Note, however, that this vote pooling relies on the ability of separate clan leaders to negotiate selective candidate withdrawal and deliver a block of votes from their clan to a particular candidate.

The increasing minority support for many successful candidates is reflected in the election results: the 1987 elections saw one candidate in Kerowagi Open in Chimbu elected with 7.9 percent of the vote; and this was surpassed in 1992 where the winning candidate in the Sinasina-Yonggamugl Open electorate (also a Chimbu seat) attracted a bare 6.3 percent of the vote. As well as undermining the overall legitimacy of both the electoral process and the elected legislature, such results point to a change in the meaning and nature of a 'constituency': for many MPs, their actual constituency is not their electorate but the much smaller sub-group within their electorate to which they owe their allegiance, and their parliamentary positions. Standish, for example, has written that "it is assumed that 'representatives' will only work for the benefit of a small minority who actually voted for them, which can be as low as 7 per cent under the first-past-the-post ballot" and that "usually the majority ... of voters opposed the winner, and often refuse to let their elected member visit them" (1994, 60). Siaguru has argued that this localisation of politics has reached such a point that, even if MPs want to expand their base so as to more effectively represent their entire electorate, they cannot do so for fear of upsetting their clan base.<sup>17</sup>

### Electoral violence

The high rate of candidature also appears to be a factor contributing to the increasingly common phenomenon of electoral violence. The Electoral Commissioner has defined electoral violence as including "intimidation of electors and electoral officials, particularly through the use of weapons; murders; unauthorised road-blocks; [and] snatching of ballot papers and ballot boxes", and asserted that the 1997 elections were the most violent ever (1997, 7). Similar statements have been made after previous elections.<sup>18</sup> Threats of violence against the electoral administration is an increasing problem in PNG, and recent elections in some of the more volatile highlands areas have

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<sup>16</sup> Personal communication, Dr John Burton, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 24 February 1996.

<sup>17</sup> Interview, Sir Anthony Siaguru, 25 July 1996.

<sup>18</sup> See PNG Electoral Commission 1983, 88.

provided detailed evidence of electoral officials being intimidated, sometimes at gunpoint, into issuing multiple ballot papers.<sup>19</sup>

Electoral violence between opposing candidates and their supporters is probably the predominant form of election-related violence in PNG. Such disputes can take many forms, but many if not most incidents are related to ongoing inter-group conflict for which an election provides a temporary focus but not necessarily an underlying cause (Dinnen 1996). Many incidents are also the result of losing candidates and their supporters protesting the election result. Standish has described recent elections in Chimbu Province in the following terms:

Elections are times of frenzied collective competition between dozens of candidates per electorate, each representing his group, offering inducements and making threats, with huge sums spent and much at stake ... in many polling booths officials were coerced with weapons (axes, knives and pistols) to give out ballot papers in bulk and accept people blatantly voting ten or twenty times ... One intending voter was chased from a booth and stoned to death, and five were killed in post-election disturbances, including at least four for voting 'the wrong way', that is against the desire of their communities (1994, 70-71).

While a cause of great concern, this type of 'gunpoint democracy' is not, however, a dominant pattern in PNG as a whole — at least, not yet.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, there are clear regional and structural trends to election violence in PNG: it is precisely those highlands regions such as Enga, Simbu and the Western and Eastern Highlands provinces where block voting and high candidacy are most pronounced that electoral violence also appears to be a factor.<sup>21</sup>

Most categorisations of electoral violence suggest that it is 'anti-system' behaviour which attacks the legitimacy of the democratic system itself (Electoral Commissioner 1997, 7). While the causes of election violence are clearly complex and multi-dimensional, and often appear to be spontaneous reactions to a host of grievances, there is also a sense in which electoral violence can be seen as an example of rational (if anti-social) behaviour to the incentives presented by the FPTP electoral system: as 10 or 20 votes sometimes separate the winner from the second-placed candidate, any action taken to influence only a small number of votes can have significant effects. Just as the small number of potential second-preferences gained under an AV system can be the threshold

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Standish 1996, 277-322 and Dinnen 1996, 91-95.

<sup>20</sup> See Saffu 1996, 41.

<sup>21</sup> See Standish 1996, 277-322; Dinnen 1996, 91-98. See also 'Polls officer warns against use of force', *The National*, 14 January 1997.



between victory and defeat, so small numbers of votes forcibly gained (or, more often, forcibly withheld) under FPTP can prove crucial. Instances of a candidate's supporters hijacking and destroying ballot boxes containing ballots from 'hostile' regions of an electorate, as occurred in Komo-Margarima after the 1992 election<sup>22</sup>, would be less politically attractive when a candidate has the possibility of picking up second or third preferences from a rival's home area.

While voting patterns in PNG have always been largely parochial and clan-based regardless of the electoral system, the pre-independence AV system clearly rewarded candidates who cultivated the support of those outside their own local area. Strathern, for example, has argued that pre-independence elections were characterised by "the idea of the politician as a collective advocate of the people" (1993, 49). By the 1980s, however,

it was understood that politicians are in power to benefit themselves and their factions, and they concentrate on consolidating their existing power bases. As a result of armed conflict between groups these bases had become more, rather than less, rigidly defined and a process of neotribalization was well under way (Strathern 1993, 48).

Changes in the nature of campaigning have been among the most marked effects of the increasing incidence of election-related violence under FPTP. As noted earlier, pre-independence election studies indicated that the winning candidates in many electorates were those who cultivated the preferences of those outside their own local area. Such spreading of the net is almost inconceivable in many parts of PNG today, where the risks of campaigning in a 'hostile' area tend to overshadow the (marginal) possibilities of picking up significant numbers of votes from rival areas. This pattern is particularly prevalent in highlands regions, where increasingly candidates are virtually restricted to campaigning only in their home base areas. For example, in the last three elections in 1987, 1992 and 1997, few candidates in the highlands campaigned beyond their own locality due to the very real possibility of violence if they ventured into a rival's clan or tribal region (Standish 1994, 1996). In other regions, particularly the larger and less developed electorates in the Gulf and Northern electorates, co-operative campaigning is still a factor today, although not always for co-operative reasons. Running a campaign in these areas requires considerable resources and energy, and constant expenditure on transport. In the Kerema Open electorate in the Gulf in 1987, for example, Oliver found

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<sup>22</sup> As documented in Dinnen 1996, 94-95.

that boat and road transport difficulties forced candidates to work together, with the most common combination being Open and Provincial candidates from the same party sharing travel costs (1989b, 167). Similarly, a single candidate in a highly fragmented constituency needs to strike a judicious balance between appealing to home areas alone and to campaigning in hostile areas which offer extra votes. May's analysis of ballot box results from Angoram Open in 1987 suggests that "energetic campaigning and 'being known' (both of which parties facilitate) gain votes, but that local support factors are still of great importance, especially for minor candidates" (1989, 120).

One of the attributes of AV most frequently-cited in PNG is that it enables voters to give their second preferences to candidates from *outside* their immediate clan network, rather than being effectively forced to vote for the nominated clan candidate. In 1996, Angalimp-South Wahgi MP William Wii used this argument to suggest that the re-introduction of AV would help "minimise or prevent election-related problems", claiming that FPTP "has created problems whereby an individual voter's rights to vote for the candidate of his or her choice is not exercised". In a letter to Electoral Commissioner Reuben Kaiulo, Wii argued that "people feared for their lives and property if they voted according to their own choice instead of voting as someone else demanded", and that "voters were being forced with threats, sometimes at the point of a gun, to cast votes for certain candidates even if they disagreed with those candidates". AV, he argued, would enable voters to give at least their second-preference for their preferred candidate, thus enabling "people to go to the polls in a good frame of mind" ('Preferential system is best for voters - Wii', *Post-Courier*, 1 April 1996).

There is some historical justification for Wii's contention that the more aggressive campaigning patterns found under FPTP are directly related to the electoral system. Looking at the 1977 elections in the Southern Highlands, Ballard found that the competitiveness induced by the new FPTP system left "no incentive for collaboration through shared preferences". One result was that

the campaign in the Southern Highlands was much more aggressive than in previous elections. In the past it was common for candidates to travel together, since rarely did they have access to their own vehicles and it was common for them to ask people to 'Vote for the best candidate; if you think I am the best, vote for me, but if you think someone else is best, give me your second preference' (1983, 188).

While some candidates continued to conduct their campaigns in this style, others resorted to open criticism of opposing candidates, a new phenomenon which quickly increased tensions. In combination with the large jump in 'ephemeral' candidates attracted by the new FPTP electoral system, this led to a much more aggressive contest than had been the case in previous elections (Ballard 1983, 192). Rising levels of electoral violence, widespread dummy candidature and 'vote-splitting' and increasingly unrepresentative elected members appears to have been a result.

While FPTP in PNG does not appear to have had the same deleterious consequences upon minorities as in other ethnically-divided regions, there is some evidence to support Lewis's oft-quoted contention that "the surest way to kill the idea of democracy in a plural society is to adopt the Anglo-American electoral system of first-past-the-post" (Lewis 1965, 71). Recent anthropological research in the Western Highlands, for example, has concluded that 'traditional' divisions between clans have been reformulated and reinforced by FPTP, placing some tribes which have a complex range of traditional alliances and allegiances with others "in an inescapable bind", because the electoral system forces them to make one choice rather than express the true complexity of their relationships, whereas AV "would give them a way out by allowing them to distribute their preferences between or among candidates to whom they owe loyalty – and even have some left over for those they feel are just good candidates" (Rumsey, forthcoming). Rumsey argues that the use of FPTP in the Ku Waru region at recent elections has hindered efforts at local-level peacemaking between rival tribes based on traditional ties, whereas an AV system would have been fully compatible with such efforts. He concludes that the Ku Waru case thus provides "a powerful argument in favour" of the re-introduction of AV (Rumsey, forthcoming).

### **Attempts to re-introduce the Alternative Vote**

As we have seen, questions about the suitability of FPTP for PNG appeared immediately after the 1977 election, with both academics and government officials citing its tendency to encourage 'zero sum' campaigning styles and enabling clan voting blocs to dominate electoral competition. Serious consideration of the reintroduction of AV began after the 1982 election, when the effect of 'vote splitting' and other negative aspects of the new electoral system became clearer. Reviewing the 1982 election,

Premdas and Steeves wrote that FPTP “was the focus of widespread criticism”, as under PNG’s extremely heterogeneous social conditions “votes cast could be so fragmented that candidates were not encouraged to campaign beyond their village or kin group because they could win by only a slim plurality” (1983, 993). The PNG Electoral Commission similarly argued that while AV was time consuming and more complex than FPTP, it also ensured that “popular feeling was canvassed”. FPTP was simple and easy to understand, but failed to “encourage the people to look beyond their own linguistic group” and, by enabling candidates with a small but solid block of votes to win, did not “contribute to creating national attitudes towards the general elections” (1982, 31-32).

The 1982 elections saw the Pangu Pati, riding on the back of the prestige of Prime Minister Michael Somare, score an overwhelming victory, with a sizeable parliamentary majority and the possibility of gaining the necessary two-thirds parliamentary vote necessary to reform the electoral system and amend the Constitution or an organic law. Under the influence of its chief strategist Tony Siaguru, Minister for the Public Service in Somare’s 1982 cabinet, Pangu had committed itself, upon winning government, to a series of constitutional and organic law amendments aimed at stabilising PNG parliamentary politics, including a return to AV. A later leader of a Pangu-breakaway party, the League for National Advancement, Siaguru has been probably the most perceptive critic of PNG’s current electoral system. He first campaigned publicly for electoral reform in 1982, proposing three fundamental changes aimed at stabilising parliamentary politics: a constitutional amendment to allow the prime minister to call an election if he lost the confidence of parliament; ‘anti-hopping’ provisions to force members who switched parties to face an immediate by-election; and the re-adoption of AV. Siaguru argued that a return to AV would result in the election of superior politicians with broader support bases:

(people) consider themselves bound by social and family obligations to cast their first vote for their relative or a person from their own clan, house line or language group. It might not be that that person is the best candidate in the judgement of the voter! But he or she is obliged because of social traditions to vote for him. I know of elections in the past, when the optional preferential system was in use, where candidates went around the electorate saying “Don’t vote for me as your first choice. I know you will have to give your first choice to your line candidate. But give me second.” And they did get in on second preferences or third preferences. They did it with far

greater representative support than, say, the member who has got in with less than ten per cent of the vote. That is ridiculous!<sup>23</sup>

Despite being supported by Prime Minister Somare's Cabinet in 1982, none of the three proposed changes was ever put to Parliament. Sean Dorney has told the story:

Within three months of Somare's solid win in the 1982 elections, Cabinet approved the drafting of all three changes. They were put on the Parliamentary notice paper but withered for lack of caucus support. Constitutional and Electoral Act amendments such as these require a two-thirds majority of parliament at two separate sittings not less than two months apart. This means the support of seventy-three members, not once but twice, with a gap between the votes. There was an outside chance that Somare could have pushed these amendments through in the first twelve months of the 1982-87 parliament. No PNG government has ever been in a stronger position than Somare's was then ... [but] there was little support from his own backbench and none whatsoever amongst the members of his fractious coalition partner, the United Party. After the first twelve months it was all a lost cause as government numbers drifted and Pangu's own internal problems intensified (1990, 79).

The proposals were thus scuttled by the very factors they were attempting to address — backbench domination of the executive leading to unstable parliamentary numbers and policy paralysis. The difficulty of change was emphasised when the Pangu government fell apart in 1985, with defections to Pias Wingti's new People's Democratic Movement, moves which would almost certainly not have taken place if the reform proposals had succeeded.<sup>24</sup>

Nonetheless, Siaguru continued his campaign for electoral and constitutional reform following the elections. In 1985, in an article published in both the *Times of Papua New Guinea* and the *Australian*, he again put forward a case for widespread constitutional reform, arguing that PNG's Westminster system was reminiscent of 18<sup>th</sup>-century England in its unstable factionalism and personality-driven politics. He suggested a number of measures to enhance effective government and strengthen the position of the Prime Minister, including (again) the re-introduction of AV; official registration of all political parties; halving (to 14) the size of the Ministry; compulsory by-elections for MPs changing parties after their election; and a constitutional amendment to allow a Prime Minister to request the governor-general to dissolve Parliament and call fresh elections.

Siaguru argued that AV is “complementary to the emergence of disciplined parties, since it encourages the presentation of disciplined philosophies of government as the

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<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Dorney 1990, 78-79.

<sup>24</sup> The irony of the situation was reinforced in 1986 when Siaguru himself defected from Pangu to form a new political party, the League for National Advancement.

basis for the elector to cast his preferences” and would thus “be a major step in realising a national consciousness among Highlanders, Papuans, Islanders and New Guineans” (‘Why this brand of the Westminster system isn’t working in today’s Papua New Guinea’, *The Times of Papua New Guinea*, 21 July 1985). Some scholars have made similar claims about the impact of AV in Australia, arguing that it has been a factor in ensuring that the major Australian parties maintain a strong presence across all regions, and that successive federal governments have not relied on localised support (Cullen 1990, 29fn). Siaguru refined his arguments in a further newspaper article after the 1987 elections, writing that

The recent election has borne out all my worst fears. The extreme multiplicity of candidates, combined with first-past-the-post, has produced results not only absurd but dangerous. As more and more candidates stand, so the appeal to the electorate becomes more and more localised. The candidate with the largest localised support base wins. Elected members emerge with a ridiculously low percentage of the vote ... The system no longer provides for the best representation, nor does it provide for the most able leaders. The consequences of frustration and disillusionment among the electorate lead to violence and community upheaval. An optional preferential system will not only enable fairer representation, but by encouraging the presentation of genuine philosophies (rather than parochial appeal) as a basis for the elector to cast his preferences, it will make for more disciplined political parties (‘Get it right this time’, *Post-Courier*, 5 August 1987).

In 1986, Siaguru introduced a private members bill, the *Organic Law on National Elections (Preferential Voting) Amendment Bill*, aimed specifically at reintroducing AV for PNG’s national elections. As a proposed amendment to an organic law, the bill was referred by parliament to the Permanent Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Laws and Acts, which effectively scuttled the proposal, arguing that it would disadvantage illiterate voters and cause confusion more generally (1986, 6). Unlike previous occasions, however, the bill was debated in Parliament and thus provides a valuable opportunity to consider the arguments for and against AV in the eyes of PNG parliamentarians.

There was considerable support for electoral reform amongst senior MPs, particularly those who had served in several parliaments (such as Iambakey Okuk, John Momis and Julius Chan). The then Minister for Justice, Warren Dutton, who had been elected under both electoral systems, argued that AV resulted in greater identification between the electorate and the elected member, saying

when I was first elected to this Parliament in 1968, even the people who had given me their sixth and last preference vote considered that they had in fact voted for me and therefore, I was their member and I would look after all of them rather than just the small group of people who gave me their first preferences (*Hansard*, 27 November 1986).

The failure of FPTP to encourage this link between the electorate and their MP was one of the major weaknesses of FPTP, which he felt encouraged electoral violence and tribal fighting:

I would state categorically that the reason why we have had so many Courts of Disputed Returns, why we have had instances of violence and other disruptions during elections, can be placed squarely on the first-past-the-post system. I, as the Minister for Police, visited the Chimbu area at one stage and went to two places where there were tribal fights in continuation. They were in continuation for four weeks before I got there. When I talked to the warring groups in both the fighting areas, the basic reason given was dissatisfaction with the provincial government election which was carried out a month or so before ... they were dissatisfied to the point of taking up arms against each other because they felt that the person who had been elected to the Chimbu provincial government had not been elected fairly because only his tribesfolk had voted for him. None of the rest of the electorate, who were by far the great majority, had voted for him and as far as the majority of the people in those two areas were concerned, the elected member was virtually illegal, improperly elected, because they had not had a proper say in his election ... if we were able to pass these amendments I am prepared to guarantee that the elections that we will hold in 1987 would be more peaceful, more respected, and would return to Parliament members who were supported by the majority of the people in their electorates (*Hansard*, 27 November 1986).

Dutton also argued that incumbent MPs would be the likely beneficiaries of a return to AV, as they would be better known than their opponents and therefore more likely to gain second preferences “after the tribal obligations have been fulfilled by giving the first vote to the person of each and every tribe” (*Hansard*, 27 November 1986). If this argument was designed to appeal to members’ collective self-interest (always a good strategy in PNG), it was not successful. While numerous members from both sides of the Parliament stated their support for the amendment in principle, many went on to say that, with a national election due within six months, there was not enough time to make such a major change before the 1987 election. The government formally opposed the bill for this reason, and for the rather more disingenuous reason that it would be “selfish” behaviour on the part of sitting MPs to introduce a system which would improve their re-election chances as incumbents (*Hansard*, 27 November 1986)! Most speakers pledged to support the bill if it was re-submitted after the 1987 election. Unfortunately for Siaguru, he lost his seat of Moresby North-East after an acrimonious election campaign, and the momentum behind the proposed amendments disappeared with his political career.

Following the 1987 election, two academics with long connections with PNG, Ted Wolfers and Tony Regan, produced undoubtedly the most detailed and comprehensive review of PNG’s electoral system to date, *The Electoral Process in Papua New Guinea: A Handbook of Issues and Options* (1988). As its title suggests, the review did not

prescribe specific changes but covered options for reform in a large number of technical aspects of the electoral system. It avoided, however, discussion of the most pressing issue: whether FPTP should remain or be replaced. Nonetheless, pressure for serious reform of the electoral system continued. Following the 1987 elections the Electoral Commission addressed the possible benefits of a return to AV for the first time. Stating that previous election results had posed the question “as to whether the nation has an efficient democratic process”, the Electoral Commissioner argued that AV would reduce conflict, and that losers would more readily accept the result:

The question that has to be addressed is whether [AV] reduces conflict and generates greater acceptance of the final result because “trading off” of preferences between candidates will occur. This spreads the sense of the winner’s having relied on more electors than gave him/her their first option. In the final count of a preferential system the winner is seen as having an absolute majority over his nearest opponent. He can, therefore, be seen as having been invested with majority approval. First-past-the-post is simpler and should yield quicker results, but ... a small solid block of votes from a *lain* or linguistic group can determine who wins. This does not engender responsibility to the whole electorate, nor, ultimately, national attitudes (1987, 4).

Although some technical aspects of the Commission’s reasoning were open to question<sup>25</sup>, the fact that it joined the debate on electoral reform at all was a significant step. In recent years, however, the Electoral Commission has tended to oppose any change of electoral system, arguing for the simplicity of the incumbent system and the complexity of the alternatives. The Commission’s submission to the Bi-partisan Parliamentary Select Committee on Provincial Government, for example, reiterated the arguments for first-past-the-post first put by the Constitutional Planning Committee in 1974, and concluded by stating that FPTP has “proven to be simple and easy to understand, counting is much easier and results are known much quicker. I shudder to think about the various complications caused by a departure from this system” (PNG Electoral Commission N.d.b). The final report of the Bi-partisan Committee, when it came, did include a chapter on the electoral system, but did not canvass more substantive reforms. The only reference to the electoral system was a one-line recommendation that “the voting system of first-past-the-post be retained” (National Parliament of Papua New Guinea 1993, 7).

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<sup>25</sup> The argument that preferential voting delivers an absolute majority to the winning candidate applies more to a full preferential system than to an optional preferential one. This is because a system that makes marking of preferences compulsory will almost always result in an absolute majority of formal votes for one candidate, whereas an optional preferential system will usually have a high number of ‘exhausted’ votes, resulting in the winning candidate often achieving less than an absolute majority (an ‘exhausted’ vote comprises a ballot where the preferences for an excluded candidate cannot be passed on to any continuing candidate, hence ‘exhausting’ before the full distribution of preferences).



### *The re-introduction of AV?*

Pressure for electoral reform in PNG has tended to come from a small handful of senior politicians and political observers. In September 1989, Minister of State Ted Diro said that the government was “seriously considering” substantial electoral reforms including a “limited preferential voting system” (*Post-Courier*, 19 September 1989). Following the 1992 election, the option for a change to AV was again raised, this time by the Minister for Provincial Affairs and Village Development, John Nilkare, who told parliament that “we need to instate an optional preference system of voting so that the most popular candidate in the constituency can win ... not ‘because I have the biggest tribe and therefore, I win’” (*Hansard*, 12 March 1993). It was not until 1993, however, that the first serious steps towards electoral reform in PNG were undertaken, when Manus Province returned to AV for their provincial government elections, becoming the first province in the country to do so. Premier Stephen Pokawin was a strong supporter of the new system, claiming that it would provide the “legitimacy of leadership” that was lacking under FPTP, as “many national and provincial leaders could not claim to represent their people when they were voted in by a few who had given them a simple majority” (‘Manus to use preferential voting for new assembly’, *Post-Courier*, 8 August 1993).

Manus’s AV elections were held in August 1993 and provided an ideal opportunity to see if a return to AV would be feasible, and whether it would result in candidates with more widespread support being elected. The results were encouraging for proponents of AV: of the 17 winning candidates, only one (Premier Pokawin) was able to win the seat on first preferences. Six others gained absolute majorities after the distribution of preferences. Importantly for those who claim that AV would deliver results similar to a straight plurality contest, in five electorates the winning candidate was not leading on first preferences. As the PNG Electoral Commission noted, under FPTP “those five people who enjoyed a greater mandate by the people would never have got in” (1995, 6). Professor Yaw Saffu of the University of Papua New Guinea, who observed the elections as a guest of the province, concluded that

in my view there is no question that the more elaborate and complicated mechanics of the optional preferential system presented no noticeable difficulties for either the voters or the electoral officials. It is also clear that the new voting system allowed all winners, except the Premier who won by an absolute majority on the first count, to improve ... on the level of support they could claim to enjoy amongst their voters. In that sense, the cause for democracy and enhanced leadership has been served (PNG Electoral Commission 1995, 6).

While this experiment (*brukim bus* in the words of Premier Pokawin) with AV was clearly a success, it took place in conditions unlikely to be replicated across the rest of PNG. Manus is a small island province with relatively good communications, high rates of literacy, an effective bureaucracy, a small centralised population and a relatively high degree of social cohesion. Few if any of these factors are typical of the rest of the country, particularly the mainland areas.

Nonetheless, the success of the Manus experiment has encouraged more serious consideration of re-introducing AV at the national level. At the 21<sup>st</sup> Waigani Seminar held in Port Moresby in August 1995, Warren Dutton, then a political advisor to Prime Minister Julius Chan, returned to the electoral systems debate, claiming that the decision to change from AV to FPTP was “the root cause of PNG’s current political problems”. Citing the case of the Member for Sinasina-Yonggamugl, Ben Okoro, who won his seat at the 1992 election with less than 7 percent of the vote, Dutton argued that this meant that 93 percent of the electorate concerned was effectively disenfranchised:

This is the prime cause of our political problems today. What we’ve done is disenfranchised the people and they are rebelling ... Electoral statistics show that seven percent is the least number of votes a candidate can win by. Most members of parliament are elected with less than 50 percent and remarkably few are elected with more than 50 percent. Basically, our system of representation is supposed to be based on representation of all people, but in effect, in most electorates, a member is really representing only his own clan or an alliance of clans. In such a situation, the member is likely to distribute his EDF in the area of the 7 percent of the voters who elected him. The 93 percent of the people who did not vote for him know that the member can do very little for them in his term of office. This is why politicians are held in such low esteem (‘Dutton: voting system cause of difficulties’, *Post-Courier*, 31 August 1995).

In February 1995, the PNG Cabinet agreed that the 1997 election would be held under an optional preferential AV system, with preferences limited to three only (PNG Electoral Commission 1995, 1). The then Minister of State, Arnold Marsipal, announced the decision to Parliament on 16 March the same year. The proposals were initiated directly from the Prime Minister’s Office without recourse to the Electoral Commission, but significantly this time they had the support of the Electoral Commissioner, Reuben Kaiulo, who argued that the change to AV would encourage campaigning members to reach out beyond their own clan areas in search of wider support rather than concentrating all their campaigning within their tribal ‘home’ area. Kaiulo advised Cabinet that whereas FPTP was adopted for its simplicity,

at a time when the electorate was considered to be unable to deal with a complex voting system ... the electorate is now more experienced and those who take the trouble to vote will be capable of using the preferential system if they so choose, providing that the system has been explained to the

voting public and the number of preferences is kept down to a manageable limit of three. Preferential voting will ensure that the final result is more representative of the electorate's wishes by taking into account the second and third preferences of voters (PNG Electoral Commission 1996, 3).

This would have significant benefits, he said, for the smooth running of the electoral process, the level of electoral violence, and the quality of representation provided by elected MPs.<sup>26</sup>

In July 1996, Dutton claimed that almost three-quarters of the National Parliament supported electoral reform, and that a change to AV would be “the most crucial thing in improving government in Papua New Guinea”. Dutton made a number of additional claims for the beneficial impact of AV, arguing that it would improve the conduct of the count, particularly in areas of high contestation such as the highlands, because the elimination of low-placed candidates would also enable the ejection of those candidates’ scrutineers and hopeful supporters from the counting station and surrounds (thus easing the chaos of a counting station in which every candidate is entitled to have two scrutineers present) while progressively enhancing the legitimacy of the remaining candidates (who can be seen to have built on the vote base of the eliminated candidates) as results are sequentially announced. Furthermore, Dutton argued that the need under AV to cover the whole electorate and reach out to other clan groups to gain preferences will require the assistance of party organisations — and thus that AV would help to strengthen PNG’s weak party system.<sup>27</sup>

Even with this level of support, by late 1996 it was clear that the reforms had again failed to attract sufficient parliamentary support. Despite amending legislation having been drafted, Prime Minister Chan was unable to convince his backbench that a change of electoral system would not harm their own interests. The proposed reforms were killed off in party meetings without ever reaching a vote in parliament. As in previous years, the large number of MPs elected with minimal support levels who would have been adversely affected by any reforms combined to effectively end the reform proposal. The lack of party discipline in PNG means that substantive electoral reform has thus become almost impossible to achieve: those who have the most to lose are the very parliamentarians who are being asked to approve the reforms. The failure of this

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<sup>26</sup> Interview, Reuben Kailulo, PNG Electoral Commissioner, 23 July 1996.

<sup>27</sup> Interview, Warren Dutton, Prime Minister's Advisor, 23 July 1996.

concerted attempt at a return to AV means that such a reform must now be considered unlikely in PNG for the foreseeable future. Nonetheless, pressure for change is likely to continue: a Commonwealth Observer Mission report on the 1997 elections recommended that “given the numbers of candidates contesting elections in Papua New Guinea, serious consideration should be given to alternative systems of voting” (Commonwealth Secretariat 1997, 7). The new Prime Minister, Bill Skate, is apparently also a supporter of a change to AV, so further attempts at electoral reform are not out of the question.<sup>28</sup>

## **Conclusion**

To what extent the increasing fragmentation of electoral competition and rising levels of electoral violence in PNG since independence can be attributed to the influence of the electoral system is difficult to estimate with any confidence. Because the change of electoral system was coterminous with decolonisation and the departure of the Australian colonial administration, AV elections were clearly affected by different circumstances than those held under FPTP. For example, pre-independence elections were not themselves a direct route to government, which was still controlled by the Australian administration until 1973, and were thus not necessarily as fiercely contested as future elections. Similarly, the ‘guided’ nature of democracy in PNG in these early years, with the hand of the Australian administration often visible, probably moulded political competition into more moderate expressions than would otherwise have been the case, and the influence of the Australian administration in the management of the electoral process was also a significant factor.

Nonetheless, relevant areas of both PNG’s traditional society (such as the importance of clan affiliations for electoral support) and the modern apparatus of representative government (such as mass suffrage elections to an elected legislature) evidenced continuity as well as change over this period. The evidence from this chapter suggests that AV encouraged co-operative campaigning behaviour in many electoral contests in the pre-independence days. Under AV, candidates from smaller clans or those without a ‘block’ vote were able to campaign outside their home base area for other voters’ second preferences, in the full knowledge that first preferences would always go to the

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<sup>28</sup> Personal communication, Reuben Kaiulo, PNG Electoral Commissioner, 8 October 1997.

'local' clan candidate. In areas where there was no clear majority candidate, accommodative campaigning practices were encouraged by the need to garner second preferences which may be relatively small in number but could provide the necessary margin of victory. AV also enabled the votes of several aligned candidates to accumulate so that diverse but related electoral interests could be marshalled successfully without the vote being 'split' several ways.

Whether these accommodative effects would be replicated if PNG were to re-adopt an AV system must, however, remain speculative. PNG politics is much more competitive now than in the pre-independence days, and the stakes are much higher. What we can say with some confidence is that the PNG politicians quoted above clearly believe that the type of accommodative campaign strategies adopted by some candidates under AV are not rewarded under a FPTP system, where voters often feel bound to give their vote to their clan candidate. In addition, the tiny proportion of voters who actually elect their local member under FPTP in some seats appears to have undermined the representativeness of the legislature, and to have contributed to instances of electoral violence. It is also the case, however, that substantive electoral reform in PNG has become increasingly unlikely with the failure of the most recent reform attempts in 1997. These characteristic features of PNG elections are therefore likely to continue, and probably increase, in the foreseeable future.

## **Chapter Five:**

### **Comparative evidence from other divided societies — the cases of Fiji and Sri Lanka**

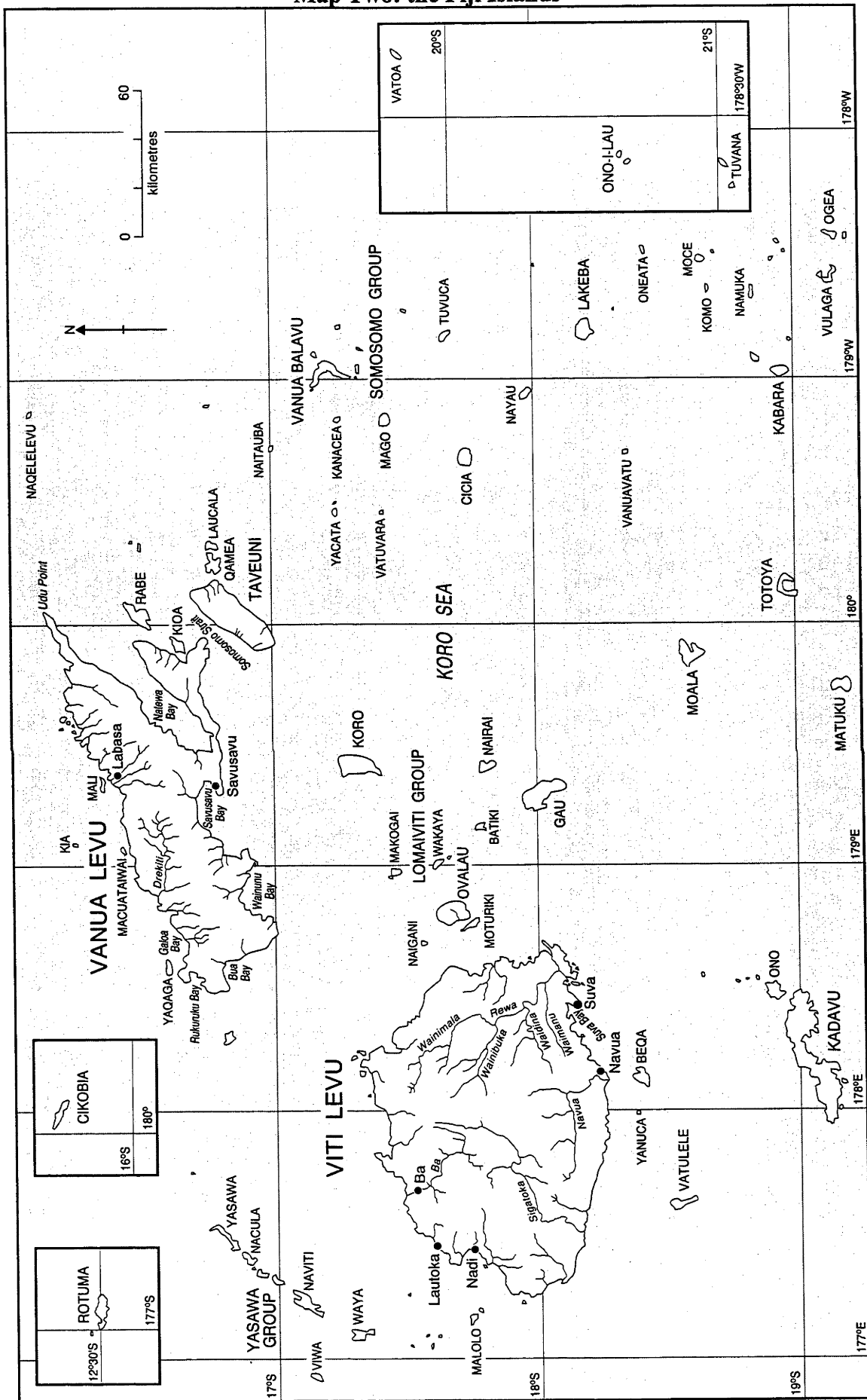
As the previous chapter has outlined, there is evidence that preferential voting, when used in PNG's early national elections, encouraged a degree of collaboration and accommodation between candidates for office. However, the circumstances of the PNG case are in many ways unique. PNG's multitude of ethnic groups are typically small and isolated, with inter-group conflict being manifested at the local level rather than as a contest for state power; the elections in question took place at an early and relatively undeveloped stage of political competition; the electoral process was almost certainly administered more efficiently under the Australian administration than in the post-independence period; and the pervasive influences of colonial rule make it difficult to disentangle just how much of the political behaviour witnessed at these early elections can legitimately be interpreted as a valid response to the system itself as compared to the strictures of the Australian administration.

Unfortunately for comparative purposes, there are few cases of similar electoral arrangements being used over a substantial time-period in other ethnically-divided societies which could help ascertain whether the apparently moderation-inducing effects of AV in pre-independence PNG are likely to be replicable elsewhere. In addition, the failure of electoral reform prior to the 1997 PNG election itself removed what may have been the best chance for examining this issue in a contemporary context. For this reason, it is important to examine the available evidence from what cases there are – less substantial though they may be – in which divided societies have adopted AV-like electoral systems in order to encourage more moderate political competition, but where the systems have not, as yet, been fully tested. There are two such cases: Fiji, which in 1997 introduced an AV electoral system for all future elections for this very purpose; and Sri Lanka, which has used a form of preferential voting to elect its President since 1978. These two cases provide mostly speculative but still important material to support the evidence presented in the previous chapter.

## Fiji

Fiji, an island of approximately 750 000 people in the South Pacific (see Map Two), has been the site of one of the most comprehensive attempts at constitutional engineering in recent years. The primary source of ethnic conflict in Fiji concerns relations between Fiji's indigenous population and the Indian Fijian community. Fiji's indigenous population is characterised by its mixture of Melanesian and Polynesian features — indicative of its geographical position at the interface between the two major population groups of the South Pacific islands. By contrast, Fiji's Indian community are mostly the descendants of indentured labourers who came to Fiji in the 19th century to work on sugar plantations under British colonial rule. While other groups such as Chinese, Europeans and Rotumans are also present, in essence Fiji's primary ethnic cleavage runs along a bi-polar division between these 'Indo-Fijian' (i.e. Indian) and indigenous (i.e. Melanesian and Polynesian) populations. Fijian society and politics has long been characterised by an uneasy co-existence between the two communities, with Indo-Fijians predominating in certain key sectors of the economy (particularly the sugar-cane industry) and indigenous Fijians owning 90% of the land (much of it under long-term lease for sugar production) but holding limited economic power. While the population ratios of the two groups are fairly similar — 50 percent indigenous Fijian, 44 percent Indo-Fijian on latest figures (Constitution Review Commission 1996, 790-791) — there is very limited informal social or economic interaction between the two communities. They speak different languages, practice different religions, work in different occupations, join different social groups, play different sports, and have very little casual day-to-day contact. Inter-marriage between the two groups, one of the best indicators of communal relations, is still extremely rare. Fiji is thus a classic example of what Furnivall described as a 'plural society', one in which "different sections of the same community [live] side by side, but separately, within the same political unit ... It is in the strictest sense a medley, for they mix but do not combine" (1948, 304).

### Map Two: the Fiji Islands





After achieving independence from Britain in 1970 and making what appeared to be a relatively successful attempt at consolidating a new multiethnic democracy, Fiji shocked the Pacific region by experiencing two military coups in May and September 1987, following the election in April 1987 of a government seen by significant elements of the Fijian community, and particularly the indigenous Fijian-dominated military, as being overly close to the Indo-Fijian community. The new government comprised a coalition of the National Federation Party, which drew its support predominantly from Indo-Fijians, and the Fiji Labour Party, with cross-ethnic support, headed by an indigenous Fijian, Dr Timoci Bavadra. The coup leader, Major-General Sitiveni Rabuka, later claimed that the coups were carried out to prevent bloodshed that would have resulted from outraged expressions of Fijian nationalism had the elected government continued in office (Dean and Ritova 1988). There has been considerable academic debate concerning the true motivations behind the coup, with some analysts seeing it as a racially-motivated response by the indigenous Fijian community to the threat of Indo-Fijian domination (Scarr 1988), and others interpreting it as a more complex event encouraged by class interests, competition between chiefly and commoner indigenous Fijians, regional tensions and personal ambition (Robertson and Tamanisau 1988; Lal 1988; Lawson 1991).

Under Fiji's 1970 Constitution, the actual racial balance in the 52-seat parliament was pre-determined, with 22 seats reserved for Fijians, 22 seats reserved for Indo-Fijians and the remaining 8 seats reserved for 'General Electors' (i.e. Europeans, Chinese and others, who were thus proportionately over-represented in parliament compared to their numbers in the population). Electors were likewise divided into communal groups (i.e. Fijian, Indo-Fijian and General Electors) on the electoral roll (in other words, there were separate electoral rolls for each community, so that electoral competition took place within groups rather than between them). For the 22 seats reserved for each of the Fijian and the Indo-Fijian communities, in each case 12 were chosen purely by members of the relevant communal group, while the remaining ten were elected from 'national' seats, in which any elector could vote, even though the race of the candidate was pre-determined. General Electors had three communal seats and five national seats. The national seats were introduced to encourage a degree of 'cross-voting' by members of one ethnic community for candidates from another community, so that elected members from these seats had to draw a degree of support from all ethnic groups. Each elector

had four votes: one for their communal representative, and one each for the national candidate from each of the three designated communal groups. An indigenous Fijian voter, for example, would vote for a Fijian candidate in his or her communal electorate, and then cast three additional votes — one for a Fijian, one for an Indo-Fijian and for a General Elector — in the appropriate national electorates. A FPTP electoral system was used for all seats.

This complicated system was introduced with the assumption that members of one ethnic group would vote overwhelmingly for their communal candidate, with the ‘cross-voting’ national seats designed specifically to induce a degree of non-communal electoral activity. Analysis of election results suggests that assumptions that communal interests would inevitably determine voter choice did not always hold, however. Prior to independence, analysis of election results indicate that Indo-Fijians in particular were far from a unified block when it came to voting, with approximately 40 percent of Indo-Fijian voters favouring a party other than the ‘Indian’ National Federation Party (Lawson 1991, 185). After independence in 1970, there was also evidence of increasing internal competition within indigenous Fijian ranks, especially in terms of competition between the chiefly elite in eastern Fiji and increasingly assertive commoner interests in the west (Lawson 1991, 211). At the 1987 general election, the Bavadra coalition campaigned on a multi-racial platform and won 14 of the 25 national seats, suggesting a significant degree of cross-ethnic support. This supports the centripetalist theory that, even in ethnically-divided societies, there will usually be a sufficient number of ‘floating voters’ prepared, under some circumstances, to give their vote to a candidate from another ethnic group to make cross-ethnic appeals worthwhile. Indeed, Lawson argues in her analysis of the 1987 elections that “this is the only possible explanation for the coalition’s victory in some of the marginal national constituencies” (1991, 250). Even in the communal Fijian seats, the coalition succeeded in winning a critical 9.6 percent of the ethnic Fijian vote, indicating that a significant number of ethnic Fijians must have been prepared to support what was widely perceived as an Indo-Fijian dominated coalition (Payne 1995, 40). This fragmentation of party support is crucial to Fiji’s future adoption of a centripetal constitutional engineering package, as two of the key facilitating conditions for centripetal approaches – a fragmentation of party support within ethnic groups, and a willingness of some voters, under some circumstances, to

vote for a party associated with an ethnic group other than their own – both appear to have been present in pre-coup Fiji.

Rabuka's 1987 coups resulted in a new, ethnically-biased 1990 Constitution which enshrined a racial weighting in favour of the indigenous Fijian population over the Indian population in terms of both civil rights and political representation, via an electoral system based exclusively on communal political representation for the different ethnic groups. These electoral arrangements had their origin in the pre-coup electoral system, but dispensed with the 'national' seats featuring open competition on a non-racial basis for office in favour of a purely communal system heavily weighted in favour of indigenous Fijians, who were guaranteed an absolute majority of parliamentary seats (37 out of a total of 70 seats). By contrast, 27 seats were reserved for Indo-Fijians, five for General Voters and one seat was reserved for Rotumans (who had previously voted with Fijians). By under-representing the Indo-Fijian community, and reserving certain offices such as the prime ministership for indigenous Fijians, the 1990 Constitution ensured that true inter-ethnic political competition was virtually impossible. The guarantee of a permanent majority of seats for ethnic Fijians turned the legislature into a classic in-group and out-group parliament: ethnic Fijians formed the government, while Indo-Fijians and others formed the opposition.

In late 1994, following international pressure, economic difficulties and high levels of external migration by the Indian community, the Fijian government established a Constitution Review Commission (CRC) with the express purpose of reviewing Fiji's racially-based Constitution with a view towards recommending a more appropriate form of representation. The CRC recommended that Fiji move "gradually but decisively" away from communalism towards a free, open and multi-ethnic political system (CRC 1996). The CRC's report, *The Fiji Islands: Towards a United Future*, recommended the adoption of a new non-racial constitution combining strong constitutional guarantees of human rights (such as a bill of rights and a human rights commission) with revised parliamentary and electoral arrangements designed to encourage the development of multi-ethnic politics in Fiji. Acknowledging that political parties in many ethnically-divided societies tend to be based around particular ethnic groups, the CRC's stated objective was "to find ways of encouraging all, or a sufficient number, of them to come

together for the purpose of governing the country in a way that gives all communities an opportunity to take part” (1996, 308).

One notable aspect of the report is the centrality given to the electoral system as a means of encouraging the development of accommodative inter-ethnic relations. Like a number of academic analyses, the CRC viewed the electoral system as the most powerful tool by which the nature of Fijian politics could be influenced and engineered. The CRC went through a careful process of assessing and evaluating major electoral systems against a set of specified criteria, the most important of which was the capacity to encourage multi-ethnic government. Other important criteria against which systems were evaluated included a recognition of the importance of political parties; the incentives presented for moderation and co-operation across ethnic lines; and effective representation of constituents. The report recommended that the most effective way to maximise these criteria would be via “the preferential system known as the Alternative Vote” (CRC 1996, 304). The CRC adopted a centripetalist approach to the question of encouraging democracy in divided societies. They posited politicians and political parties as the key actors in the political system who would respond rationally to the incentives and restraints imposed by the electoral system. As long as electorates were ethnically heterogeneous and there was a number of political parties contesting the elections, politicians and parties would need to attract the second or third preference votes of voters from another ethnic group to maximise their chances of electoral success. Candidates who adopted moderate positions on ethnic issues and attempted to represent the ‘middle ground’ would, under this logic, be more electorally successful than extremists. By making politicians from one group reliant on votes from the other group for their electoral success, AV could encourage a degree of ‘preference swapping’ between the two which could help to encourage accommodation between (and within) Fiji’s divided Indian and ethnic Fijian communities. The incentives for election would thus work to move Fijian politics away from the extremes towards a more moderate, centrist, multi-racial competition for power.

The arguments put forward for the accommodative effects of AV by the CRC thus replicate, to a significant extent, those put forward by advocates of AV in Papua New Guinea. Interestingly, an earlier commission of inquiry into Fiji’s electoral system in 1975, chaired by Professor Harry Street, also came to a similar conclusion. The Street

Commission, as it was known, recommended a series of reforms, based on implicit centripetal principles, to the electoral provisions of Fiji's 1970 independence Constitution. They argued that Fiji needed an electoral system "which is fair and equitable, and which at the same time does not encourage or perpetuate communal thinking or communal politics". Their conclusion was that the Fijian parliament should comprise a mixture of communal and open seats. They recommended that twenty-five members should be elected, in open competition, from five constituencies each returning five-members via the Single Transferable Vote; while 28 members should be elected from communal rolls in single-member districts via the Alternative Vote (Parliament of Fiji 1975, 12-16). It is instructive to note how similar these recommendations, which were never implemented, were to those put forward by the CRC over 20 years later, especially considering that the failure of democratic politics in Fiji has been attributed by some observers to the 1970 Constitution's rigid communal structure (Lawson 1988; Lawson 1991).

Both the Street Commission and the CRC also specifically rejected the case for consociationalism, the best-established model of electoral competition in divided societies, which is based on the proportional representation of all ethnic groups in parliament, who can then form a 'grand coalition' government based on principles of power sharing between all major groups. Both commissions argued that the list PR electoral systems favoured by consociationalists give too much power to party bosses, unnecessarily constrain voter choice and, because of the need for large national or regional districts, often fails to provide the necessary links between a voter and his or her member of parliament (CRC 1996, 307; Parliament of Fiji 1975, 13). The CRC's critique of list PR went on to question the arguments behind proportional representation in general. Under PR electoral rules, they argued, ethnic parties can expect to be represented in the legislature in proportion to their numbers in the community irrespective of whether they are inclined towards moderation or not. Hence PR, when combined with communal seats, offers "few incentives to parties to become more multi-ethnic in their composition or more willing to take account of the interests of all communities" (CRC 1996, 312). While the CRC's major objection to list PR was its lack of geographical accountability due to the need for large multi-member electoral districts, a related concern focussed on the distinction between minority *representation* facilitated by PR electoral rules and minority *influence* under AV:

In the circumstances of the Fiji Islands, the Commission considers that electoral incentives are necessary to reinforce accommodations reached by agreement among ethnic communities. The system in force since before independence [i.e. communal roll elections] has, in effect, focussed on the need for their adequate representation. It is evident that such representation alone has not bought about multi-ethnic governments (1996, 312).

This is an important point, as the communal roll system used in Fiji ensured, if nothing else, that for many years the members of the respective communities were represented in the legislature in broad proportion to their numbers in the general community. In fact, Fiji's communal-roll system, based on FPTP electoral rules, has been cited in the scholarly literature as an example of a system in which highly proportional results, if not institutions, were present.<sup>1</sup> However, between 1970 and 1987, the proportionate representation of ethnic groups in the legislature resulted in one group forming a more-or-less permanent government, while the other formed the opposition.<sup>2</sup> There was little if any genuine accommodation between groups — a situation no doubt magnified, but not caused, by the “artificial solidarity within communities resulting from representation through communal seats filled by voting on a communal roll” (CRC 1996, 312). Proportional ethnic representation in Fiji may thus have reinforced divisions between the indigenous and Indian communities; according to one account, “Fiji's highly proportional electoral rules appear to have interacted with ethnic issues to cause the coup” (Bohrer 1997, 223).

The CRC recommended that the the Fijian parliament's 70-seat lower house, to be called the *Bose Lawa*, should be retained but significantly reformed. Instead of the majority of seats being elected by communal voters only, as was the case under the 1970 Constitution, the Commission recommended that most seats should be open contests between candidates from any group. Forty-five of the 70 seats would be elected from 15 three-member ‘open’ constituencies, with boundaries drawn so as to ensure a significant degree of ethnic heterogeneity. There would be no communal qualifications for voters or candidates in these open seats. The remaining 25 seats would continue to be elected on a communal basis from single-member constituencies, with 12 seats reserved for indigenous Fijians, 10 seats for Indo-Fijians, two for General Voters and one for Rotumans. The upper house, to be called the *Bose e Cake*, would comprise 35 seats, 28 of which would be elected in open competition and six of which would be

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<sup>1</sup> See Bohrer 1997, 223.

<sup>2</sup> See Lawson 1988, 35-47.

appointed by the president. The president would be elected at a joint sitting of both houses of parliament. Elections for the *Bose Lawa*, *Bose e Cake* and the presidency would all be held under the alternative vote, although in an unusual variation the CRC suggested that, to avoid problems of intra-party competition in the multi-member seats, the first, second and third preferences given to each candidate should be added together, before the candidate with the lowest number of votes is eliminated (CRC 1996, 329).

Following substantial public debate and evaluation of the CRC's report by a series of parliamentary committees, the Fijian parliament adopted a new constitution in June 1997. While largely in line with the CRC's thinking, the electoral arrangements provided by the 1997 constitution differ from those advocated by the CRC in several crucial respects. Most importantly, the Fijian parliament did not make the decisive move away from communalism recommended, and in fact reversed the suggested breakdown between open and communal seats recommended by the CRC. Of the 70 seats in the new parliament, 45 will continue to be elected on a communal basis, leaving only 25 'open' seats in which genuine inter-ethnic competition will take place. Second, concerns about the workability of the multi-member AV system recommended by the CRC resulted in the system finally chosen being based on single-member electoral districts, rather than the multi-member districts recommended by the Commission. This means that to achieve the type of 'preference-swapping' between different communities envisaged by the Commission, the boundaries of these small districts will have to be drawn in such a way as to be ethnically-heterogeneous — a potentially difficult proposition. The CRC's recommendation that preference votes be cumulated rather than counted separately in the new electoral system was also discarded following interventions pointing out the unworkability of such a scheme (Reilly 1997c, 83-89). The electoral system provided in the 1997 constitution is thus single-member AV, as used in Australia and in pre-independence PNG. The government also rejected a number of the CRC's recommendations for an elected upper house. Finally, the new Constitution adds a significant element of consociationalism in its requirement for mandated power-sharing to the integrative electoral arrangements by providing that all parties that achieve at least 10 percent of the vote must be represented in the cabinet in proportion to their vote share.

Fiji's new Constitution is thus a good example of what Donald Horowitz (an influential adviser to the Commission) has called "a redundant dose" of institutional incentives towards power-sharing and co-operation (1991a, 281). If the electoral system works as intended it should result in the election of a pool of moderate candidates dependent on the support of both political communities for their electoral survival, and thus a degree of accommodation between supporters of rival groups at the local level. But even if this does not occur, the mandated grand coalition cabinet provided by the Constitution should ensure that both communities have to work together at the elite level at least. This double-dose of accommodation-inducing mechanisms means that there is a number of 'safety measures' built into the new dispensation: if one should fail, backup measures are there to ensure at least a modicum of power-sharing at another level. In particular, the combination of centripetal electoral institutions with consociational power-sharing provisions represents an interesting and potentially influential combination of two previously divergent approaches to constitutional engineering.

The CRC's report also represents the most comprehensive and significant evaluation of the potential of constitutional engineering via centripetal electoral methods to date. The adoption of much of the CRC's thinking in the new Fijian Constitution represent an important practical imprimatur for the possibilities of the centripetal model of ethnic conflict management. Fiji's first elections under the new constitutional arrangements are scheduled to take place by early 1999. These elections will represent an ideal opportunity to see if the claims put forward for the accommodative effects of preference-swapping under AV electoral rules will materialise in a setting of deep and ongoing ethnic antagonisms. Until that time, however, the arguments of the CRC for the accommodative effects of their model must remain speculative: we simply do not know yet if AV will work to break down ethnic antagonisms in a divided 'bi-polar' state. We do, however, have some evidence from another divided bi-communal polity which has utilised preferential voting methods for national elections: the South Asian state of Sri Lanka.

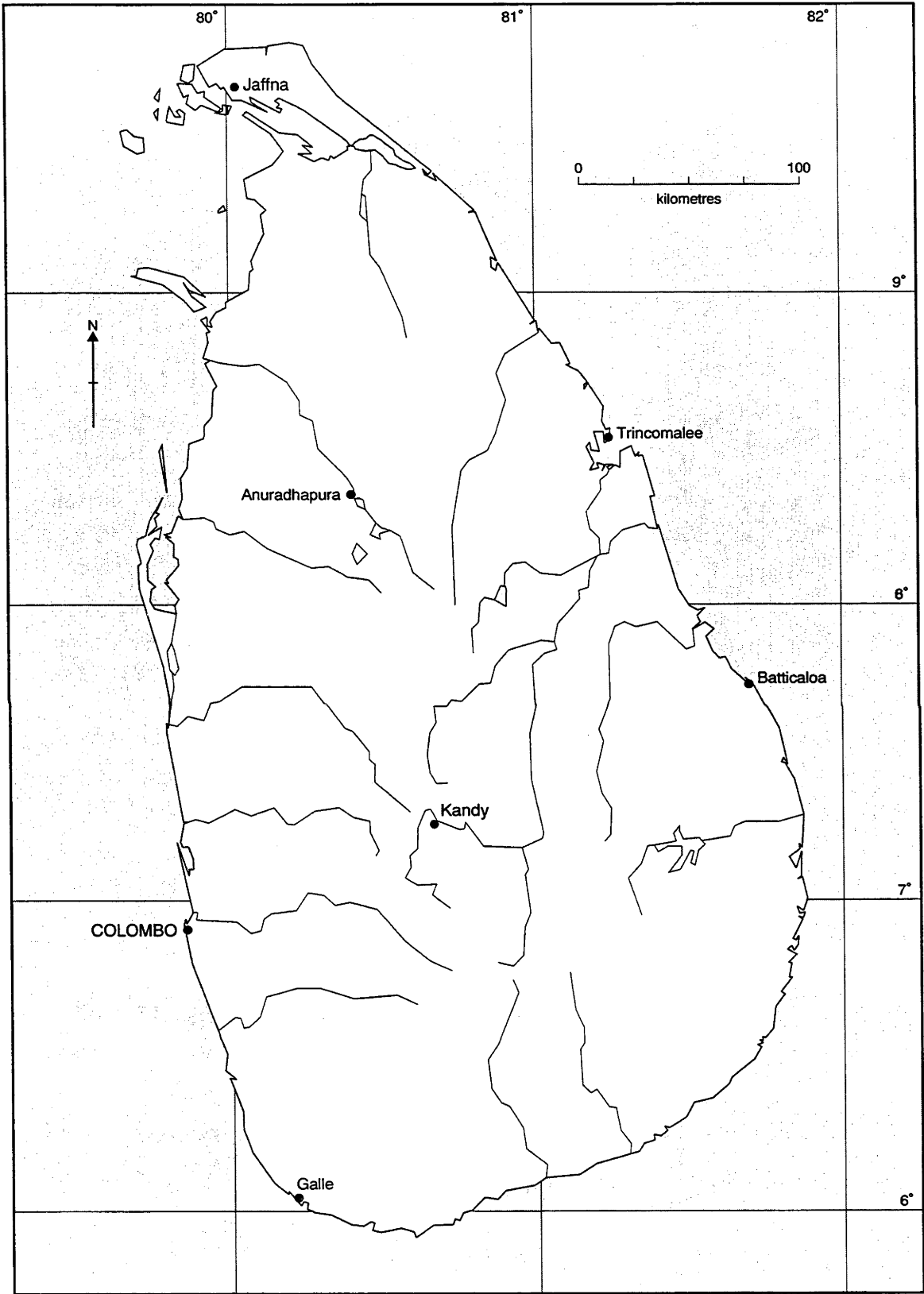


## **Sri Lanka**

The island of Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon) is one of the foremost examples of a 'constitutional laboratory' in the world today. Like Fiji, Sri Lanka is a plural society with clearly defined ethnic groups. The majority group, the Sinhalese, constitute approximately 74 percent of the population. Sri Lankan Tamils make up 12 percent, so-called 'Indian' Tamils approximately six percent, and Muslims another seven percent of the population. The groups are ethnically, religiously and regionally distinct, being concentrated in different parts of the island (see Map Three). The Sinhalese are mostly Buddhists who speak Sinhala, and predominate in the island's southwest; both Tamil groups are Hindus who speak Tamil, with Sri Lankan Tamils concentrated in the northeast and Indian Tamils in the tea plantations in the centre of the island; and Muslims are found on both the east and west coasts, often speaking Arabic, in addition to other languages (Shastri 1997, 133-34).

A nation with a bloody recent history of ethnic conflict between the majority Sinhalese and minority Sri Lankan Tamil populations, Sri Lanka has experimented with a variety of innovative constitutional and electoral arrangements in its efforts to ensure minority groups have a meaningful stake in the political process, with varying degrees of success. Like many other former British colonies, Sri Lanka inherited a Westminster model of parliamentary government, with the first full general election for the Parliament (consisting of a House of Representatives and a Senate) held in 1947. In 1971 Sri Lanka changed from a bicameral to a unicameral legislature with the abolition of the Senate. Although Sri Lanka achieved independence in 1948, it was not until 1972 that it adopted its current name and embarked on the process of writing its own constitution as an independent nation state. An elected Constituent Assembly drafted the First Republican Constitution which provided for a unicameral legislature known as the National State Assembly. In 1978 this body was renamed the Parliament after a select committee (under the chairmanship of the nation's most dominant political figure to date, J.R. Jayewardene) drafted a revised constitution which transformed the Sri Lankan system of government into an executive presidency, with Jayewardene vacating his position as prime minister to assume the new office of an elected executive head of state.

Map Three: Sri Lanka



In terms of electoral arrangements, Sri Lanka adopted the British first-past-the-post system for its first general elections in 1947 (although with multi-member electorates as well as single-member ones), before converting in 1978 to a form of party list PR and preferential voting for its parliamentary and presidential elections respectively. In the process, Sri Lanka has experimented with a range of unusual and sometimes conflicting electoral arrangements, which has confirmed its self-proclaimed reputation as one of the world's "constitutional guinea pigs".<sup>3</sup> Sri Lanka is of particular interest because it is the only country in the world which uses a preferential electoral system to elect an executive president.<sup>4</sup> The structure of government chosen in 1978 was similar to the French 'semi-presidential' system: a powerful executive president counterbalanced by a legislature elected by proportional representation. Like her counterpart under the French model, the Sri Lankan president has substantial executive powers, with the added power of being able to hand-pick the ministry, including the prime minister — the only proviso being that all ministers must be members of the elected legislature. Hence the characterisation of the Sri Lankan Second Republic as 'the Gaullist system in Asia' (Wilson 1980).

#### *Sri Lanka's electoral arrangements*

Prior to the adoption of a new constitution in 1978, Sri Lanka's electoral arrangements had been almost purely in the Westminster mode. Sri Lanka has a long and impressive history of competitive elections and democratic procedures, although these have been significantly marred by the ethnic conflict and political assassinations of the last two decades. Universal adult suffrage was introduced in 1931, giving Sri Lanka a record of democratic elections without equal in Asia. In 1959 the voting age was lowered to eighteen years, predating a similar move in most Western countries by at least a decade. Sri Lanka's electoral administration is under the direct control of a commissioner of elections, a senior public servant independent of ministerial supervision who can only

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<sup>3</sup> Interview, R.K. Chandrananda de Silva, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 22 March 1996. de Silva was Sri Lanka's Commissioner of Elections between 1978 and 1994 and was responsible for a number of the electoral experiments discussed in this chapter.

<sup>4</sup> This statement needs some qualification due to the case of the Republic of Ireland. Ireland has a non-executive president who occupies an almost exclusively ceremonial office but who is, nonetheless, popularly elected (although half of all scheduled presidential elections to date have been uncontested). Article 12.2.3 of the Irish Constitution specifies that the electoral system for presidential elections shall be "proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote", which is identical to AV when used for elections of one representative, such as a president.

be removed by Parliament itself, and elections have tended to be regarded as free from fraud or other forms of malpractice (Kearney 1987, 82).

Prior to independence in 1947, the British colonial authority introduced a written Constitution providing for parliamentary government, with executive authority reposing in a cabinet composed of ministers drawn from and responsible to the legislature. Election in most seats was by the first-past-the-post system in single-member constituencies, although a few multi-member constituencies returning two or three members were created at each redistribution, "with the intent of enhancing the chances of election of candidates belonging to one of the island's ethnic minorities" (Wilson 1980, 80). The electoral devices used to facilitate this unusual arrangement give a pointer to Sri Lanka's later adoption of preferential voting. In the multi-member constituencies each voter could cast as many votes as there were candidates to be elected; all the votes could be cast for a single candidate or distributed amongst several candidates (the assumption being that ethnic minorities would be likely to deliver all their votes to their ethnic candidate, an assumption that appears to have held true in respect of Sri Lanka's Muslim population at least) (Wilson 1980, 80). These multi-member seats were, however, in a minority, with the overriding majority of seats elected from single-member electorates under a FPTP electoral formula. The results, however, were quite unlike the fluid and fragmented party system experienced under FPTP in PNG: in Sri Lanka, the longstanding and deep-rooted cleavages along religious, ethnic, linguistic and ideological lines resulted in a well-developed system of competitive political parties based around particular ethnic groups.

Like the Fijian case, no one party had a monopoly of support from a particular ethnic group. The Sinhalese electorate, in particular, split its support almost equally between two large parties. The finely balanced nature of Sri Lanka's multi-party system was characterised increasingly in the 1960s and 70s by competition for government between two major Sinhalese parties, the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP), with smaller Marxist or Tamil parties sometimes holding the balance of power. The 'seat bonuses' provided by the FPTP electoral system to the winning party meant that small changes in vote share could and did result in major changes in the make-up of parliament. Prior to 1978, Sri Lanka experienced a change of government at almost every election, with the winning party's vote share often

considerably smaller than their eventual proportion of seats. In 1970, for example, the SLFP gained 37 percent of the vote but won over 60 percent of seats in the legislature. In 1977 the UNP scored 51 percent of the vote but won 83 percent of all seats — results which led the Select Committee of the National State Assembly appointed to consider revision of the constitution to recommend a change to PR for parliamentary elections, arguing that “the legislature is not fairly representative of political opinion in the electorates” (Parliamentary Series 14 of the Second National State Assembly 1978, 212). The other major difficulty of FPTP was the fact that it disadvantaged geographically dispersed minorities — a problem exacerbated by the fact that, until 1978, electoral divisions were allocated on the basis of population (inclusive of non-citizens) rather than electors. This meant that voters in those areas which had substantial numbers of non-Sri Lankan citizens (including many ‘Indian’ Tamils and Sri Lankans who had opted for Indian citizenship), who were not allowed to enrol and vote, were proportionately over-represented in the legislature. In practice, the effect of this provision was to give a disproportionate weighting in favour of the rural Sinhalese in many areas, to the disadvantage of minorities (de Silva 1994, 20). The Select Committee made it clear that it was the disproportionality of electoral results rather than the institutional discrimination against minorities which was the major factor in its decision to recommend dispensing with FPTP (Parliamentary Series 14 of the Second National State Assembly 1978, 214). Nonetheless, the change in 1978 to allocating seats on the basis of the number of enrolled electors rather than the total population has meant that minority groups are now considerably better represented in the Sri Lankan parliament, as they now form a larger proportion of enrolled voters in some electoral constituencies than was previously the case.

### Electing the president

The greater institutional recognition of minorities, plus the move to a list system of PR for parliamentary elections, meant that no single party would be likely to gain an absolute majority of seats in the legislature. Thus it was all the more important that the new office of executive president be filled by a national figure representative of all groups in society and able to encourage consensual politics between the varying groups. This focused attention on the method of election to that office, and particularly on the means by which ethnic minorities could be included in the selection process rather than

being overwhelmed by the Sinhalese majority. Implicit in this was the desire on the part of the governing UNP to end the endemic post-election violence “which has been a characteristic feature in Sri Lanka at least since 1965” (de Silva 1979, 198). The problem was this: the president would have to represent all groups in Sri Lankan society and be seen as a figure capable of moderating between opposing interests. The method of election for such a figure would thus be crucial to the fate of the office, which would require at least a majority of voters supporting the successful candidate. But only once since independence had any political party secured a majority of the vote at a national election; most governments were in fact elected with considerably less than that. The solution was to apply the preferential vote to the election of the presidency, so that presidential candidates would be forced to look beyond their own party or ethnic group for support because the successful candidate would have to be elected (either outright or via preferences) by an absolute majority of all voters.

Interestingly, there is no evidence that the Sri Lankan constitutional draftsmen on the select committee made reference to other countries like Australia when it came to devising a system of preferential voting.<sup>5</sup> Instead, they appear to have started from first principles, seeking to ensure that any president would be elected by an absolute majority of voters and then devising the appropriate institutional mechanisms to achieve this. As much of the 1978 Constitution had its philosophic origins in the French fifth republic model of a strong executive presidency combined with an elected legislature, initial plans provided for a French-style two-round system of elections (Parliamentary Series 14 of the Second National State Assembly 1978, 243). However, the extra cost and security issues associated with holding two separate elections within a two-week period appears to have prompted the decision to combine the initial and run-off rounds of voting into one election via the expression of preferences.<sup>6</sup> According to K.M. de Silva, two men were chiefly responsible for the move to a preferential system: Lalith Athulathmudali, a government minister and member of the Select Committee who was assassinated in April 1993, and Mark Fernando, who was then an adviser to the Committee.<sup>7</sup> Justice Fernando, now a Supreme Court judge, has confirmed that the system was developed by the Committee without reference to Australia or any other

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<sup>5</sup> Interview, K. M. de Silva, Director, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Sri Lanka, 26 March 1996.

<sup>6</sup> Interview, R.K. Chandrananda de Silva, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 22 March 1996.

<sup>7</sup> Interview, K.M. de Silva, Director, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Sri Lanka, 26 March 1996.

country, and that it was a compromise between the need to achieve majority support for a victor and the practical necessity in the Sri Lankan context of holding one rather than two elections. While initially attracted to the double ballot system, the Select Committee believed that the inconvenience and expense of a second election, and the undue maintenance of the high degree of tension associated with electoral politics in Sri Lanka for a further two weeks, would not be conducive to democratic principles.<sup>8</sup>

The Select Committee effectively recommended a preferential electoral system so as to achieve both the initial and run-off stages of a double ballot election in one contest. In keeping close to the French model, preferences would only be distributed to the two leading candidates in the event that neither obtained an absolute majority on first preferences. This is a significant departure from the alternative vote, in which preferences from lower-placed candidates are transferred to all remaining candidates, not just the top two. In a further unique variation, a decision was taken to make the expression of preferences optional, but to restrict the number of preferences expressed to no more than three. Section 94(1) of the 1978 constitution provides that

At the election of the President every voter casting his vote for any candidate may -

(a) where there are three candidates for election, specify his second preference; and

(b) where there are more than three candidates for election, specify his second and third preferences.

(2) The candidate, if any, who receives more than one-half of the valid votes cast shall be declared elected as President.

(3) Where no candidate is declared elected under paragraph (2) of this Article, the candidate or candidates, other than the candidates who received the highest and second highest number of votes, shall be eliminated from the contest, and-

(a) the second preference of each voter whose vote has been for a candidate eliminated from the contest, shall, if it is for one or the other of the remaining two candidates, be counted as a vote for such candidate and be added to the votes counted in his favour under paragraph (2), and

(b) the third preference of each voter referred to in sub-paragraph (a) whose second preference is not counted under that sub-paragraph shall, if it is for one or the other of the remaining two candidates, be counted as a vote for such candidate and be added to the votes counted in his favour under sub-paragraph (a) and paragraph (2),

and the candidate who receives the majority of the votes so counted shall be declared elected as President.

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<sup>8</sup> Interview, Justice Mark Fernando, Sri Lanka Supreme Court, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 3 April 1996.

This was effectively a new example of the contingent vote which was first used in the Australian state of Queensland in 1892, and which is recognised in Australia as the forerunner to the alternative vote.<sup>9</sup> If no candidate gains more than 50 percent of the vote, all candidates other than the top two are eliminated, and their second and third preferences redistributed to the remaining candidates. This is a significant simplification of the full AV system, both for the voters and the electoral administrators. The voters need only write the numbers one to three on the ballot, regardless of the number of candidates, which while somewhat restrictive is probably a more realistic assessment of the genuine preferences of most electors than requiring them to rank order every candidate. The task for those counting the vote is considerably simpler than under AV: instead of having to go through the process of eliminating each candidate successively and distributing his or her votes to those remaining, the Sri Lankan contest effectively becomes a run-off between the top two candidates (as in the French system), but without the expense of a second election. Wilson's assessment of Sri Lanka's post-1978 system of government as "a hybrid, a cross between the British and the French" (1980, xiii) is thus right on target regarding the electoral system at least. It is a hybrid system, designed with particular political goals in mind, which utilises some of the basic aspects of both the alternative vote and the two-round system.

It is worth noting that these two systems — the alternative vote and the two-round system — have traditionally been lumped together by political scientists as the two examples of "majority formulae" found in Western countries<sup>10</sup> — not because of any structural similarities, but rather because both strive to achieve a majority victor in each case. Lijphart, for example, argues that AV "may be thought of as a refinement of the majority-run-off formula in the sense that weak candidates are eliminated one at a time (instead of all but the top two candidates at the same time) and that voters do not have to go to the polls twice" (1994a, 19). The contingent vote as adopted in Sri Lanka is closer to the French run-off model than to the alternative vote, as all but the top two candidates are indeed eliminated at the same time. In fact, some parties such as the SLFP, argued in 1978 that a two-round system should be adopted instead of the contingent vote (Parliamentary Series 14 of the Second National State Assembly 1978, 151). In some Australian states such as New South Wales, the contingent vote was historically seen as

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<sup>9</sup> See Wright 1980, 34, 58-61.

<sup>10</sup> See Rae 1967, 107-10.



a middle point between the two-round system and the alternative vote. In Sri Lanka, by contrast, there is no evidence that a move towards AV was ever contemplated, and in fact there has been pressure from some quarters for a return to FPTP for parliamentary elections.<sup>11</sup> During yet another constitutional review taking place at the time of writing, there has been pressure to decentralise the political system and return to a Westminster system, with the office of president being turned into a figurehead position with no executive power (Samarasinghe 1994, 1031). Were this to happen, the requirement that the president be elected would also probably be scrapped.

### The Sri Lankan experience of preferential voting

K.M. de Silva has argued that the presidential electoral system is “even more important than PR for its implications for ethnic relations in the island” (de Silva 1994, 22). The major effect of preferential voting upon the Sri Lankan political process, according to de Silva, is that it provides an incentive for the major parties to take account of minority groups in their campaigning and in their formal arrangements for preference sharing. This is a particularly significant change in Sri Lankan politics compared to the practices of earlier elections, where there was little or no disadvantage in a subtle or even blatant anti-Tamil campaign in the Sinhalese areas; indeed previous elections were won or lost in the Sinhalese areas, and the major parties could ignore the north and east of the island where the Sri Lankan Tamil population is concentrated. This situation has changed since the 1980s, and the experience of the three presidential elections held to date “shows that no party or individual aiming at the presidency could afford to alienate minorities, or fail to campaign in the Tamil areas of the north and east, as well as among the Indian plantation workers and the Muslims and Roman Catholics” (de Silva 1994, 22-23).

There is no perfect electoral system, and some of the simplifying features of the Sri Lankan system have tended to undermine its effectiveness. As the preference marking is optional rather than compulsory there is no requirement to express second and later preferences, and few voters do so (Horowitz 1991a, 192). Initial estimates by the Commissioner of Elections after the 1982 presidential poll put the rate of preference marking as low as two percent, and its usage does not appear to have increased appreciably in later elections (Commissioner of Elections 1983, 60). In fact, the Deputy

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<sup>11</sup> Interview, R.K. Chandrananda de Silva, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 22 March 1996.

Commissioner of Elections has claimed that some candidates specifically instruct their supporters not to mark any preferences.<sup>12</sup> Some parties, notably the SLFP, objected strongly to the introduction of a system of preference marking, arguing that the system was “too complex for voters in backward areas” and would disenfranchise rural voters where illiteracy was a problem. The UNP response was that the rural voter was sophisticated enough to write 1, 2 and 3 in the order of his or her preference; in any event, the optional nature of the system made the SLFP’s objections somewhat questionable (de Silva 1979, 199). Nonetheless, some commentators have attributed the reduced turnout at Sri Lanka’s first presidential vote in 1982 to “the apparent complexity of the new preferential voting system” (Samarasinghe 1983, 162). Even the Commissioner of Elections initially opposed the introduction of preferential voting in 1978, arguing that preferential voting “presupposes a sophisticated and literate community” and foreshadowing potential problems of illiteracy and confusion (Parliamentary Series 14 of the Second National State Assembly 1978, 151). While these problems do not appear to have eventuated, there is no hard evidence either way regarding the level of understanding of preferential voting on the part of voters or political parties, despite efforts by the Department of Elections to explain the mechanics of the system via press releases and media interviews (Commissioner of Elections 1992, 321).

In reality, some of these objections are less serious than they first appear. The rate of illiteracy, for example, is considerably lower in Sri Lanka than in most other developing countries. The real reason for the SLFP’s objection to the new system appeared to be their well-founded concern that the preferences of the Tamil and other minorities would flow to the more moderate UNP candidate under a preferential ballot. The history of Sri Lanka’s three presidential elections to date (in 1982, 1988 and 1994) is not conclusive, but appears to bear this concern out. Unfortunately for comparative purposes, at each election to date the winning candidate has scored a clear majority, thus obviating the need for preferences to be counted, and the Elections Department has not surveyed either the extent or the nature of preference marking for this reason.<sup>13</sup> We are thus left with the following hypothetical scenario postulated by Horowitz “to illustrate how

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<sup>12</sup> Interview, A.D. de Silva, Deputy Commissioner of Elections, Sri Lanka, 20 March 1996.

<sup>13</sup> Interview, A.D. de Silva, Deputy Commissioner of Elections, Sri Lanka, 20 March 1996.

[preferential voting] would work and how it would produce conciliatory results” (1991a, 191):

Suppose two main Sinhalese candidates are contesting the election. The first estimates 40 percent first-preference support, and the second estimates 35 percent. There is also a Sri Lankan Tamil candidate, who can count on perhaps 10-12 percent of all first-preference votes. A meeting is convened between the first Sinhalese candidate and the Tamil candidate. Since no candidate will have a majority of first-preferences, the conversation quickly turns to the subject of Tamil second preferences. The Tamil leader is asked whether he would be willing to urge Tamil voters to give their second preferences to the Sinhalese candidate. He replies that his ability to do so depends on the Sinhalese candidate’s willingness to be hospitable to Tamil aspirations. Otherwise, his appeal to Tamil voters to cast second preference ballots for a Sinhalese candidate would be futile. Before long, concrete policy issues are being discussed. By the end of the negotiations, the first Sinhalese candidate has emerged as decidedly more accommodating on Tamil issues than the second Sinhalese candidate (1991a, 193).

While Horowitz’s scenario may be hypothetical, the type of negotiations he postulates are not. At the 1994 presidential election the winning candidate, Chandrika Kumaratunga, had entered into formal coalition arrangements with the major Muslim party, and her candidature was backed by parties representing Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils as well, in recognition of her more moderate approach to ethnic issues (Schnaffer 1995, 423). Thus, while to date it is not possible to measure the extent of preference flows from minor to major party candidates in exchange for policy concessions, it is possible to make some observations about the effect of the new electoral laws on the election process, and particularly on the attitudes of major party candidates towards minority groups, although whether this has translated into identifiable changes in policies on ethnic issues or indeed in greater accommodation between ethnic groups at the non-party level remains unclear.

In 1982, the major parties were fairly well differentiated on the key issue of their attitude to Tamils, and the more moderate candidate, J.R. Jayewardene of the UNP, scored a clear victory with 52 percent of first preferences (Horowitz 1985, 641). While this may seem encouraging to the thesis that preferential voting encourages moderation and accommodation, it must be stated that the circumstances of the 1982 election were less than ideal: the rival SLFP candidate was not permitted to stand for election, and the major Tamil organisation also put forward no candidate in protest at its demands being ignored. The upshot was that no formal preference swapping arrangements were made and the new constitutional provisions were not tested. The Commissioner of Elections suggested in his report that the new preferential system “should be re-examined” as it

had caused confusion amongst voters and there was doubt as to “whether there was any serious campaign for the marking of preferences” (1983, 61).

Inter-ethnic riots and Tamil terrorist attacks in 1983 saw a sharp decline in the prospects for inter-ethnic accommodation in Sri Lanka. By the time of the next presidential elections in 1988 a civil war was being fought in Tamil areas and Tamils again boycotted the poll, which was also won by the UNP candidate, Ranasinghe Premadasa, on first preferences by a slim majority (50.4 percent). Again, the vote-pooling potential of the preferential system was not tested, although the UNP was clearly the more conciliatory party and had the support of most of the minority groups taking part in the poll — including Indian Tamils, Muslims, Sinhalese Christians — and a substantial minority of Sinhalese Buddhists (Horowitz 1991a, 192fn).

As the 1988 campaign was the most closely-fought presidential election to date, it may be useful to examine in detail the process of the count. Under section 56 of the *Presidential Elections Act 1981*, preferences are not counted if one candidate has an absolute majority of all votes cast. If no candidate has an absolute majority, the act provides that the Electoral Commissioner:

(a) where there are three candidates at the election-

- (i) eliminate from the contest the candidate who has received the lowest number of votes, and
- (ii) direct each returning officer to take such steps as may be necessary to count the second preferences of each voter whose vote has been for the candidate eliminated under sub-paragraph (i) of this paragraph, as a vote in favour of one or the other of the remaining two candidates; or

(b) where there are more than three candidates at the election-

- (i) eliminate from the contest the candidates other than the two candidates who received the highest number of votes, and
- (ii) direct each returning officer to take such steps as may be necessary-
  - (aa) to count the second preference of each voter whose vote has been for a candidate eliminated under sub-paragraph (i) of this paragraph, if it is for one of the other of the remaining two candidates, as a vote in favour of such remaining candidate; and
  - (bb) where the second preference of a voter is not counted under this sub-paragraph, to count the third preference of such voter if it is for one or the other of the remaining two candidates, as a vote in favour of such remaining candidate.

In 1988, only three candidates stood for the poll and thus voters were restricted to marking a second preference only. As for many elections in South Asia, symbols (in

this case an elephant, a hand and an eye) were allocated to each candidate to assist with party recognition and to enable illiterate electors to vote. Similar latitude is given regarding the expression of preferences: although a '1' and a '2' (and a '3' where there are more than three candidates) are the specified means for marking preferences, other combinations (for example, a '1' followed by a cross or a circle followed by a '2') are accepted as valid votes "as long as the intention of the voter can be properly understood from the nature of the marks" (Commissioner of Elections 1992, 61). The final result on first preferences in 1988 is set out in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1: Result of the 1988 Sri Lankan Presidential Election**

Candidate	Vote	% of total
Ranasinghe Premadasa (UNP)	2 569 199	50.42
Sirimavo Bandaranaike (SLFP)	2 289 860	44.94
Oswin Abeygunasekera (SLMP*)	235 719	4.62
Total votes	5 094 778	100.00

\*Sri Lanka Mahajana Pakshaya

According to this tally, Ranasinghe Premadasa received just over 50% of all first preferences and was declared elected. Clearly, a shift of less than one percent of votes would have seen no candidate gain an absolute majority of votes, and second preferences would then have determined the outcome. As no provisional count of preferences is made if a candidate wins an absolute majority, it is not possible to say how preferences would have affected the outcome. What can be said with some confidence is that, with such a slim margin of victory, the 1988 result heightened the realisation amongst Sri Lanka's political actors that second preferences may well become crucial in deciding future results. This is particularly the case considering that Sri Lankan Tamils boycotted the 1988 poll.

The most recent presidential elections, in November 1994, saw the first change of government in Sri Lanka for 17 years. Following victory at the August 1994 parliamentary elections by the People's Alliance (PA), an off-shoot of the old SLFP, the presidential elections saw a massive victory for the PA candidate Chandrika Kumaratunga, who won 62.3 percent of the first preference vote. Following such a massive win, preferences were once again irrelevant and uncounted, limiting our ability to analyse the effect that the electoral system may have had. It is significant to note,

however, that the PA had entered into vote-pooling arrangements with some minor parties (notably the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress), that Kumaratunga's candidature was backed by several Tamil parties, and that she gained support from almost all areas of the country. Commentators saw this as having significant implications for future ethnic relations on the island:

Kumaratunga's massive triumph in the presidential election was as impressive in scope as in size. She carried all but one of the country's 160 polling places, losing only a remote area inhabited largely by aboriginal tribes people. She got solid support from the majority Sinhalese community, which comprises 74% of Sri Lanka's population. She did even better amongst the minority Tamils (18.2%) and Muslims (7.4%). The magnitude of her victory significantly consolidated the mandate of the People's Alliance as it sought to bring about major political and social reforms. It also greatly strengthened the new president's hand as she moved forward to resolve the country's chronic ethnic problem and end the eleven-year civil war it has spawned (Schnaffer 1995, 409).

Again, however, while the more moderate candidate in the presidential contest triumphed, it is not possible to make any confident assessment of the impact of the electoral system on this outcome. The campaign was racked by ethnic violence. The UNP's chosen candidate, Gamini Dissanayake, was assassinated by a suicide bomber two weeks prior to the poll: the party then erred seriously by appointing his widow, who had no previous political experience, as its presidential candidate. Victory for Kumaratunga was largely seen as a foregone conclusion after the results of the earlier parliamentary elections, and her personal popularity (she hails from a Sri Lankan political dynasty) was also a significant factor. As was the case in the 1988 election, however, Kumaratunga was clearly the most moderate and accommodative candidate, and the institutional incentives for embracing ethnic minorities (in the form of preferences) may well have impacted on the nature of her overall campaign. In other words, the *possibility* that preference distribution may decide the result may be as potent a factor as whether preferences ultimately do need to be counted.

## Conclusion

One of the central hypotheses examined in this thesis is the proposition that preferential electoral systems can, in situations of ethnic division, be utilised to promote co-operation between competing ethnic groups and ensure a stake in the political process for minority groups who would otherwise be excluded. How do the Fijian and Sri Lankan examples support the case for or against this hypothesis? While there is no weight of evidence either way, there is room for cautious support from both cases. The

Fijian case represents a significant practical 'victory' for proponents of the centripetal model, but any more definitive judgement will have to wait until the first election under AV has been conducted. However, as the first state to consciously choose a preferential voting system in an attempt to engineer more moderate multi-ethnic politics, the potential implications of the Fijian case are considerable.

As noted earlier, Fijian electoral history also lends support to one key presumption of centripetal theory: that even in divided societies, there are sufficient 'floating' voters prepared to support candidates from rival ethnic groups to make vote-pooling possible. In Fiji, growing commoner assertiveness against chiefly rule, perceptions of regional privilege and discrimination, and an emerging class-consciousness amongst poorer ethnic Fijians all resulted in a fragmentation of the ethnic Fijian vote prior to the 1987 coups. These emerging non-ethnic cleavages facilitated the emergence of 'cross-cutting' political concerns that overrode ethnicity, resulting in at least 10 percent of the ethnic Fijian vote in 1987 going to what was seen as an Indian-dominated coalition.<sup>14</sup> This challenges the argument made by Nordlinger and others that such cross-ethnic voting is unlikely in divided societies as "members of the opposing conflict group are not likely to change their party attachments on the basis of a secondary issue" (Nordlinger 1972, 102). In Fiji, 'secondary issues' did indeed result in a change of party attachments in 1987. This augurs well for the prospects of more meaningful centripetal politics under the new constitutional arrangements.

A similar situation of split party support and 'cross-cutting' issues affecting voter choice is also in evidence in Sri Lanka. The evidence for centripetalism from the Sri Lankan case is also modest, but has more substantive implications. While preferences have never been counted in Sri Lankan elections, the more moderate and ethnically accommodative candidate has won at every presidential election to date. And while parties do not as yet appear to have entered into the formal preference swapping arrangements hypothesised by Horowitz, there have been less formal coalition or vote-pooling arrangements between major and minor parties. As K.M. de Silva has argued, while the question of the impact of preference swapping is still "up in the air" due to the results of the three presidential elections to date, the electoral process "does allow

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<sup>14</sup> These issues are explored in depth in Lal 1988.

minorities to have a stake in the process”.<sup>15</sup> Until preferences are counted at a presidential election it will be difficult to ascertain how sophisticated Sri Lankan political parties and voters are at utilising the potential of the system. One of the problems to date is that parties do not appear to have grasped the full potential inherent in a situation where second or third preferences may determine the election result. Unlike the practice of Australian elections (where preference marking is compulsory), parties in Sri Lanka do not distribute ‘how to vote’ cards specifying a preferred form of preference distribution on election day. While the Elections Department does make some efforts at public education, it is doubtful whether the full implications of preference distribution in the case of no candidate winning on first preferences is widely understood outside a relatively small group of educated and politically aware voters. If in future presidential elections no candidate wins an absolute majority on first preferences — which is quite likely under normal conditions, given the nature of Sri Lanka’s party system — it will be these voters whose preferences will determine the result.

The Sri Lankan example also points to the limits of constitutional engineering as a means of ethnic conflict management. While there is indeed evidence that the more moderate Sinhalese candidate has won each presidential election to date, it is unclear to what extent (if any) the preferential electoral system has impacted upon electoral strategies and outcomes. The fact that Tamils boycotted the 1982 and 1988 presidential elections is itself an indication of the impotence of strategies based on institutional incentives which presume that aggrieved political actors will remain ‘in the game’ rather than choose to carry on their fight outside the electoral arena (in the Sri Lankan case, by civil war). While moderates have indeed been elected to the presidency, there is little to suggest that this in itself has served to dampen the communal conflict in Sri Lanka. In fact, tensions have almost certainly escalated over the 20 years since the relevant constitutional reforms were introduced.

In Sri Lanka, the incentives for moderation are all in one direction — Sinhalese presidential candidates can realistically hope to pick up some Tamil second preferences were a Tamil to stand for president, but Tamil candidates could not realistically expect to achieve electoral victory via second preferences from Sinhalese voters. Electoral

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<sup>15</sup> Interview, K.M. de Silva, Director, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Sri Lanka, 26 March 1996.



engineering may well be able to place a centripetal spin on political competition, but it cannot change the basic circumstances of a conflict in which a geographically-segregated minority has been engaged in decades of brutal civil war with a majority population. In Fiji, by contrast, the relative equality in size of the two populations, their geographical intermixture and the low-intensity nature of the conflict would all appear to provide much more favourable pre-conditions for centripetal constitutional engineering strategies to succeed. In both cases, however, the fragmentation of party support within the major ethnic groups, and the apparent existence of a small but potentially crucial number of voters prepared to cast their votes (or allocate their preferences) to parties or candidates from other groups, presents favourable facilitating conditions for centripetalism as a realistic strategy for moderating political competition. The question of what other facilitating factors are likely to favour centripetal strategies for the management of ethnic conflict will be examined in more detail in the final three chapters of this thesis.

## Chapter Six: Preferential voting and political engineering

The evidence, as detailed in the previous chapters, of accommodative behaviour on the part of candidates and electors at AV elections in PNG — apparently in reaction to the incentives provided by the electoral system — and their change in behaviour under the very different incentives provided by FPTP, is obviously of importance to the ongoing debate on electoral reform in PNG. But its significance also extends further than that. As noted in the first chapter of this thesis, the evidence from PNG provides important supporting evidence for a wider theory of ethnic conflict management and democracy first proposed by Donald L. Horowitz in his book *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (1985). In this work, Horowitz argued that electoral systems have a strong role in fostering or retarding ethnic conflict, via the incentives for particular types of behaviour they offer to campaigning politicians. The basic elements of an electoral system (such as the electoral formula and the structure of the ballot) all have a potential impact on “ethnic alignments, ethnic electoral appeals, multiethnic coalitions, the growth of extremist parties, and policy outcomes” (Horowitz 1985, 628). Looking specifically at the preferential electoral system introduced for presidential elections in Sri Lanka in 1978, Horowitz speculated that the majority threshold rule inherent in the new system may create inducements for minority Tamil parties to trade preferences with the majority Sinhalese parties for victory. This should, he argued, make the second and third preferences of Tamil voters “quite valuable commodities in political exchange”, with the result that a Sinhalese president elected on Tamil preferences would have a strong electoral incentive towards moderation on ethnic issues in order to maintain Tamil support. In this way, the Sri Lankan system may encourage moderate inter-ethnic politics and should “ultimately cement coalitions of commitment” between the bargaining Tamil parties and the more conciliatory Sinhalese parties (Horowitz 1985, 639-42).

These theories were elaborated in Horowitz’s 1991 book *A Democratic South Africa? Constitutional Engineering in a Divided Society*, which put forward a substantial case for constitutional engineering as a means of constructing a viable democracy in post-apartheid South Africa. It was this work in which Horowitz developed his theory of ‘vote pooling’ in detail, and which received the most attention from supporters and critics of the theory alike. In it, Horowitz recommended that an AV electoral system

should form the centre-piece of a selection of accommodation-inducing structures (including federalism and a strong elected president) for the post-apartheid era in South Africa. According to Horowitz, an AV system could provide parties and candidates in divided societies such as South Africa's with a strong incentive to search for the political 'middle ground'. Parties which broadened their support base in search of second preferences from other parties would be more likely to win seats than parties which were unable to garner preferences outside their primary support base. In order to gain this type of support, major parties and groups would have to attract at least some secondary support from minorities — which meant adopting favourable policy positions on key areas of interest to these groups. This could in turn provide an incentive towards moderation and accommodation between rival ethnic groups (Horowitz 1991a, chap. 5).

Horowitz's proposal represented a considerable challenge to the scholarly orthodoxy concerning appropriate electoral systems for divided societies, which has long argued that some form of proportional representation is all but essential in cases of ethnic fragmentation and conflict. The most prominent advocate of this orthodoxy is Arend Lijphart, who in 1985 also advanced a detailed plan for post-apartheid South Africa, featuring a party-list form of PR (1985b, chap. 6). While Lijphart's proposal was reasonably close to the actual electoral system introduced for South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, there is no evidence that Horowitz's proposal for AV received serious consideration in South Africa itself: most South African political actors believed it was simply too complicated for what was, for most of the population, a first-generation election (Sisk 1993, 89). The case for AV has not been revived in future discussions of electoral options for South Africa, although Horowitz has continued to argue more generally for the importance of accommodative electoral institutions which encourage vote pooling<sup>1</sup>, and was an influential adviser to the Fijian Constitution Review Commission which, as discussed in the previous chapter, recommended a vote-pooling electoral system for future Fijian elections.

### **The Horowitz case**

At the heart of Horowitz's proposal for the AV is the need to create incentives for accommodation between competing interests, particularly in those societies which have

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Horowitz 1991c; Horowitz 1993.

deep-seated ethnic or other cleavages. Horowitz argues that the most feasible path to inter-group accommodation at elections is by encouraging parties to swap preferences (or 'pool votes' as he puts it) — that is, to campaign for the second preferences of those electors who voted with their first preference for other parties. In situations where no candidate can command an absolute majority of first preferences, the need to broaden a party's appeal in order to pick up these second preferences can make the difference between winning and losing a seat. Parties that adopt conciliatory policy positions and compromise with other parties are more likely to pick up second and later preferences than parties that maintain a narrowly-focused, non-compromise approach. Hence the apposite use of the term 'centripetalism' to describe this model: those candidates and parties who are broadly attractive to others will tend to be rewarded; those who have polarised support will generally not. To attract second-level preference support, candidates need to attract the votes of groups other than their own, and this is usually achieved by their moving to the centre on policy issues to attract floating voters, or by successfully accommodating 'fringe' issues into their broader policy. Candidates who are elected will thus be dependent on the votes of groups other than their own for their parliamentary positions, and can be expected to serve the needs of these groups as well as their own ethnic group if they are to establish their positions and gain re-election.

The arguments for the integrative effects of AV election rules are premised on the assumption that politicians are rational actors who will do what needs to be done to gain election. Under AV, 'what needs to be done' varies considerably depending on the makeup of the electorate. Where one candidate is confident of achieving an absolute majority of first preferences, he or she need only focus on maximising their vote share from their own supporters in order to win the seat. In cases where no candidate has outright majority support, however, the role of second and later preferences becomes crucial to attracting an overall majority. In cases of deep multi-ethnic divisions, policy-based cleavages are considerably less salient than ethnic or linguistic identities. The incentives to garner secondary support operate in exactly the same manner, however: candidates will do what they need to do to gain election. At the core of this approach is the need "to make politicians reciprocally dependent on the votes of members of groups other than their own" (Horowitz 1991b, 471). Where a candidate needs the support of other ethnic groups to gain election, there is a powerful incentive for him or her to reach out to these groups in search of their second preferences. To build support from other

groups, candidates must behave moderately and accommodatively towards them. In ethnically divided societies, this means that electoral incentives promote policy concessions: even small minorities have a value in terms of where their preferences are directed, as small numbers of votes could always make the difference between victory and defeat for major candidates.

Horowitz's conclusion is that AV is particularly appropriate for heterogeneous societies where cleavages run along ethnic lines. Under a preferential voting system, he notes, many elections will turn on second and third preferences. Parties that succeed in negotiating for second and third preferences will be rewarded. The outcome, he hopes, will be parties that deliberately moderate their policy positions so as to broaden their appeal. In those societies where ethnicity is a fundamental issue this will, he argues, result in the election of governments committed to accommodative policies:

I have advocated ... an electoral system that will make moderation rewarding by making politicians reciprocally dependent on the votes of members of groups other than their own. The dependence is only marginal, of course, but it will sometimes be the margin of victory. Since parties must pool votes before they pool merely seats, they must find ways before the election to communicate their ethnically and racially conciliatory intentions to the voters. After the election, they must deliver on those commitments or risk electoral retribution (1991a, 196).

Horowitz's hypothesis about the workings of AV has until now remained just that — an untested hypothesis. The evidence from pre-independence PNG, however, lends some support to the claim that AV can promote accommodative practices in divided societies. First, and most importantly, the electoral campaign techniques in PNG's pre-independence elections outlined in Chapter Four provide direct evidence of co-operative and accommodative campaign practices at AV elections. This is important because a lack of supporting examples has always been the Achilles heel of the centripetal 'vote-pooling' model. Sisk summed up the prevailing situation in 1996 by arguing that "although vote pooling is theoretically compelling, there is simply insufficient empirical evidence at the level of national politics to support claims that subsequent preference voting can lead to accommodative outcomes" (1996, 62). However, thanks to the detailed observations and electoral studies of PNG's three AV elections, there is some evidence for such claims, although it is a measure of the relative obscurity of Papua New Guinea for many political scientists that *none* of the commentators on this issue were aware of the PNG example until the publication of material from this thesis. The evidence from PNG, and to a lesser extent from Fiji and Sri Lanka, also provides

support for two of the other concerns raised by critics of Horowitz's theories: the "questionable assumptions" that politicians in ethnically-divided societies will respond to electoral incentives for moderation, and the question of whether voters in divided societies would be willing to give second-preference support to candidates from outside their own ethnic group (Sisk 1992, 43).

The evidence presented in Chapter Four suggests that vote pooling took place in three primary ways in pre-independence PNG, all of which were predicated on the assumption that most voters would invariably give their first preference to their own clan or 'home' candidate. The most common and successful method of vote pooling was for a candidate who had a limited 'home' support base to campaign widely for second-level support amongst rival groups. This required a range of techniques, such as translating campaign speeches and travelling widely throughout an electorate, with the essential request being not for a first-preference vote but for a second preference. This enabled electors to cast their primary vote for their ascriptive candidate — an essential element in cases of ascriptive ethnic identity — but to also indicate their second choice if their ascriptive candidate was not elected. For this strategy to succeed, candidates needed to be able to sell themselves as the 'second-best' choice — which meant, in general, someone who would look after all groups, not just their own. Bill Bloomfield's victory in the 1964 elections was a good example of this approach in action.<sup>2</sup>

A second strategy for victory under AV was for candidates with significant existing support bases to reach out to selected allies for secondary support. Traditional tribal contacts and allegiances, for example, could be utilised to create majority victors. This similarly necessitated a commitment to behave positively towards that group if elected. In the Dei Open Electorate at the 1972 elections, for example, tribal leaders of previously hostile groups made deals with each other for preference support. The winning candidate forged particularly close connections with a traditional ally tribe via 'intensive ties of ceremonial exchange', had urged his supporters to cast their preferences for a member of a hostile rival tribe as well as for himself, and consequently received a generous proportion of that opponent's second preferences to win the seat (Strathern 1976, 277-81). It is thus possible that the 'exchange' obligations of traditional PNG society were replicated in modern electoral contests by similar

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<sup>2</sup> See Hughes and van der Veur 1965, 409.

‘exchange deals’, but this time with votes rather than material goods as the unit of currency.

A third strategy, and increasingly common by the time of the third AV election in 1972, was for groups and candidates to form mutual alliances, sometimes campaigning together and urging voters to cast reciprocal preferences for one or the other. Such alliances were a response to the incentives presented by AV towards campaigning on a common platform, whereby the sharing of preferences was seen as a rational activity which maximised the prospects of electoral victory. Such mutual alliances also appear to have given some impetus to the need to organise politically, and can thus be seen as the forerunners to the establishment of political parties in PNG.

Of course, the fact that PNG’s three AV elections were all held before independence and at a relatively early stage of political awareness and competition must also be taken into account when using the PNG experience as confirming evidence for the Horowitz case. The claim that preferential voting leads directly to policy concessions, for example, is not testable in relation to the early PNG elections. However, such arguments are, I will argue below, consistent with the ‘centrist’ tendencies of political parties in Australia, the only established democracy to currently use AV for national elections. Although Australia is an ethnically-diverse society it is not an ethnically-*divided* society, in the sense of ethnicity representing a fundamental political cleavage around which political interests are formed and mobilised, and so cannot be used to directly evaluate arguments for or against centripetalism. Australia does offer, however, the best evidence of the way preferential voting can encourage policy concessions and lead to the incorporation of minority issues into mainstream public policy.

### **AV and policy moderation in Australia**

While the evidence from PNG is largely supportive of the Horowitz hypothesis, it does not provide direct support for the contention that moderation on *policy* issues will result from preference swapping and vote pooling deals. The undeveloped nature of PNG political competition in the pre-independence period meant that it was rare for candidates to contest elections on a specific policy platform. To see how preferential voting leads to policy concessions we need to look at the experience of preference swapping deals in Australia, where preferential voting — in the form of AV in the

House of Representatives and STV in the Senate — has long been a distinguishing feature of electoral politics.

Australia makes a particularly interesting case for students of centripetalism for three reasons. First, the Australian experience represents by the far the best-established and longest-running example of preferential voting in the world today, with all three of the major preferential electoral systems (AV, CV and STV) having been used for elections in various jurisdictions in Australia. All three systems were also developed or substantially refined in Australia, and the Australian development of electoral institutions represents one of the more distinctive national contributions to institutional design (McLean 1996, 369). Having been a feature of Australian politics since the early years of this century, preferential voting has become an embedded and well-institutionalized factor of Australian politics. The Australian experience thus enables us to examine the effects of preferential voting upon political competition over a long period in a stable political environment.

The second distinctive feature of Australia is its combination of high degrees of ethnic diversity with low levels of inter-ethnic conflict. Australia has one of the world's most ethnically-diverse populations, with approximately 40 percent of the population being overseas-born or the offspring of overseas-born immigrants, most of whom come from non-English speaking countries in southern Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. Despite this level of ethnic diversity, ethnic relations in Australia have been characterised by high levels of inter-communal harmony and integration, without "the sharp-edged and sometimes violent racial tension which is found in Britain, West Germany or the United States" (Jupp 1991, 51-52). Kukathas argues that Australia represents

an attractive model of a modern multi-cultural society ... its migrants have come from all parts of the world to contribute to a population marked by ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity. Yet while this diversity is no less substantial than that found in other multicultural societies such as the United States — and is more considerable than that found in others such as Malaysia or Germany or France — it prevails in circumstances that are far more peaceful, and politically and socially stable, than those in any of these other countries (1991, 167).

Australia has thus been relatively successful in integrating millions of recent arrivals into a democratic society, though considerably less so in achieving equality for its aboriginal population. In general, ethnicity has not become politicised in Australia, and many studies emphasise the low political profile of both ethnic actors and ethnic issues in Australia compared to their prominence in similar countries (see Jupp 1984).



Third, the institutions and policies of contemporary Australia represent one of the best approximations of a complete package of centripetal political institutions amongst comparable democracies (see Horowitz 1985, 597-600). Australia combines a federal system of government which disperses power geographically; preferential voting systems for state and federal elections; three levels of government (federal, state and local) contributing to devolution; formal and informal offices representing ethnic interests; government policies aimed at reducing inequalities for underprivileged groups (particularly Aborigines and immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds); and an accepted government policy of 'multiculturalism' which urges ethnic group integration but not assimilation (Jupp 1991). Australia's relatively benign ethnic situation would thus appear to offer some positive empirical evidence for the relationship between these dispersive and integrative institutions and policies and a harmonious multi-ethnic society, even if the direction of causation is far from clear.<sup>3</sup>

While Australia may offer some useful evidence for centripetal theories, for our purposes its comparative value is limited. Despite its ethnically-diverse society, Australia is clearly not a divided society in the sense of ethnicity being a politically-salient cleavage — indeed, its harmonious inter-ethnic relations would scarcely be possible if this were the case. Because of this, the Australian experience of preferential voting cannot be used to directly evaluate arguments for or against the centripetalist arguments concerning the relationship between preference-swapping arrangements under AV elections and policy moderation in divided societies. Australia does, however, offer the case which best illustrates the way preference-swapping can promote tangible policy changes on the part of parties and governments, and is thus worthy of investigation on this score alone.

The historical development of preferential voting systems in Australia is discussed in detail in the following chapter. In 1918, AV was introduced at the federal level to replace the existing FPTP system, after it became clear that several aligned conservative candidates all standing in the same electorate could split their combined vote between them under FPTP, thus handing victory to the less popular but more disciplined forces of the new Australian Labor Party (ALP). The introduction of AV was thus directly related to the need to encourage and reward collaboration or coalition arrangements

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<sup>3</sup> See Jupp 1991, 51

between parties.<sup>4</sup> This ability to aggregate aligned interests, rather than divide them, has long been a (largely unrecognised) feature of Australian electoral politics, but it has not been until relatively recently that the full potential of preference distribution as an instrument for influencing policy decisions has been evident.

The most graphic example of this process in action occurred in the campaign for the 1990 federal election, where the incumbent Australian Labor Party (ALP) was trailing the conservative Coalition badly in opinion polls and looked to be heading for electoral defeat, and where voter support for left-of-centre minority parties such as the Australian Democrats and Greens reached its height. The ALP, under the influence of senior strategist Senator Graham Richardson, assiduously courted the green vote in the lead-up to the election, both indirectly via interactions with the major environmental lobby groups and directly via media appeals to potential green voters. Policy initiatives palatable to green voters were announced, and the then Prime Minister Hawke used important sections of an address to the National Press Club to plead directly for second preferences:

I want to say to those who intend to vote for third party and independent candidates that they should consider with the greatest care where they direct their second preferences. This is a vital election and it is — I make no bones about it — a tight election. And so I say specifically to them — if you do not want Medicare gutted, the capital gains tax scrapped, more uranium mining, a uranium enrichment industry in Australia, up-front tuition fees, mining in Kakadu, then your preference between the two major parties must be Labor.<sup>5</sup>

The ALP repeated this message in a national radio and television advertising campaign, appealing directly for the second or third preferences of minor party supporters, offering policy concessions on key issues and arguing that the Labor Party was far closer to their core interests than the major alternative, the Liberal/National Coalition.<sup>6</sup> This strategy appeared markedly successful: with minor party support levels at an all time high of around 17 percent, the ALP was the beneficiary of around two-thirds of all preferences from Democrat and Green voters — a figure which probably made the difference between it winning and losing the election (Papadakis and Bean 1995, 103-4). This was thus a 'win-win' situation for both groups: the ALP gained government with less than 40 percent of the first-preference vote, while the minor parties, who did not win any

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<sup>4</sup> See Graham 1962, 164-79.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Warhurst 1990, 31.

<sup>6</sup> See Hughes 1990, 140-51.

lower house seats, nonetheless saw their preferred major party in government and committed to favourable policies in their areas of concern.

To see how this type of preference swapping worked in practice, we can examine the victory of the ALP's Neville Newell in the seat of Richmond at the 1990 federal election. Newell scored only 27 percent of the first preference vote. The coalition candidate (and then leader of the National Party) Charles Blunt won over 41 percent of first preferences, and looked set for an easy victory. However, the count saw a combination of preferences from minor parties and independents, especially the anti-nuclear campaigner Helen Caldicott, flow through to Newell and enable him to win the seat with 50.5 percent of the full preference vote.

**Table 6.1: Allocation of Preferences in Division of Richmond, 1990**

Candidate	First count	Second count	Third count	Fourth count	Fifth count	Sixth Count	Final Count
Gibbs (Australian Democrats)	4346	4380	4420	4504	4683	Excluded	Excluded
Newell (Australian Labor Party)	18423	18467	18484	18544	18683	20238	34664 (Elected)
Baillie (Independent)	187	Excluded	Excluded	Excluded	Excluded	Excluded	Excluded
Sims (Call to Australia Party)	1032	1053	1059	1116	Excluded	Excluded	Excluded
Paterson (Independent)	445	480	530	Excluded	Excluded	Excluded	Excluded
Leggett (Independent)	279	294	Excluded	Excluded	Excluded	Excluded	Excluded
Blunt (National Party)	28257	28274	28303	28416	28978	29778	33980
Caldicott (Independent)	16072	16091	16237	16438	16658	18903	Excluded

Source: Australian Electoral Commission 1990.

Newell won the seat because he was able to secure over 77 percent of Caldicott's preferences when she was excluded at the seventh count. Caldicott herself had received the majority of preferences from the other independent candidates. The ALP in Richmond, as in other seats, was thus the beneficiary of a strategy aimed at maximising not just its own vote but at maximising the preferences it received from others: the 'second preference' strategy. As support for the Australian Democrats and green parties reached its height in 1990, so the ALP's assiduous campaigning for second preferences

saw it receive around two-thirds of the preferences from these parties, which proved decisive for its electoral victory (Papadakis and Bean 1995, 103-4).

In Australia, interest in preferential voting tends to increase with its perceived partisan effect. The influence of preferences on electoral outcomes has clearly increased in recent decades and played a crucial role in the 1990 Labor victory in particular (Hughes 1990, 140-51). The collapse of the Democrat vote in 1993 and the Coalition landslide at the 1996 federal election has meant that the effects of preference distribution have received less attention since then, although it has facilitated the election of increasing numbers of independent candidates (two in 1993, five in 1996), most of whom win their seats by overtaking major party candidates on preferences. Elections held under AV also enable the votes of several aligned candidates to accumulate so that diverse but related electoral interests can be marshalled successfully without the vote being 'split' several ways. The long-standing coalition arrangement between the Liberal and National Parties in Australia is probably the best example of this arrangement working in practice. Conversely, there is evidence that AV also punishes parties which fragment internally, giving political leaders powerful incentives to maintain party unity (Jackman 1992).

Commentators on Australian politics have historically regarded AV as a variation of FPTP, in most cases giving outcomes near identical to that system in terms of election results and the structure of party systems. Douglas Rae, for example, in his seminal work on the consequences of electoral laws, stated baldly that "the Australian system behaves in all its particulars as if it were a single-member district plurality formula" (Rae 1967, 108). David Butler thought AV made little difference to Australian electoral results and had "never been central in determining how governments have been chosen" (Butler 1973, 96). Writing in 1977, Colin Hughes agreed: it was "unlikely" that AV would "determine who governs Australia" (1977, 294). The common element in all these judgements is that they were predominantly based on the Australian federal elections of the 1950s and 1960s where, with the notable exception of the Democratic Labor Party (DLP), preference distribution had little effect on electoral outcomes. Today preferences play a much more important role in deciding the outcome of Australian elections than in previous decades. It is not possible to assume that voters' primary choice at Australian AV elections would be replicated under a FPTP system,

but if it were the results of the 1961, 1969 and 1990 elections would probably have been reversed.

Analyses of the effects of AV in Australia have tended to concentrate almost exclusively on its partisan impacts. Some commentators have seen the system as an instrument for maintaining the dominance of the two major parties, the ALP and the Liberal/National Coalition, and for restricting the role of minor parties in the lower house to one of influencing the policies of the major parties rather than gaining election themselves (Hughes 1977, 294). Others claim that it can enhance the power and position of minor parties, especially if they have the potential to hold the balance of power between two major parties (Aitkin, Jinks and Warhurst 1989, 150). There is widespread agreement that AV has facilitated coalition arrangements such as that between the Liberal and National parties, and that it works to the advantage of centre candidates and parties, encouraging moderate policy positions and a search for the 'middle ground' (Bean 1986, 65). The sometimes fiery and aggressive rhetoric of Australian politics has often distracted observers from recognising just how much co-operative behaviour there is between parties — via preference swapping deals, for example — and how close the major parties are on most substantive policy issues. There is little doubt that the AV electoral system provides a significant institutional encouragement for these tendencies.

### **Criticisms of centripetalism**

The most comprehensive critique of centripetal theory has been made by Arend Lijphart, who described Horowitz's proposals as a courageous challenge to the scholarly consensus which "however courageous ... does not deserve to succeed" (1991a, 99). Lijphart made several telling criticisms of the Horowitz plan, such as Horowitz's suggestion that the AV may have to be used with multi-member constituencies, which produced disastrously lopsided results when used at Australian Senate elections from 1919-1946 (Reilly and Maley 1996), and his claim that AV can provide sufficiently proportional election results to encourage party proliferation. But his major criticisms were directed at Horowitz's claims that the use of AV in ethnically-divided societies is likely to reward moderation and produce incentives for accommodation. Lijphart argued that there is no more incentive towards moderate behaviour inherent in AV than

there is in FPTP. He characterised Horowitz's arguments by citing three imaginary candidates A, B and C supported by 45 percent, 40 percent and 15 percent of the voters respectively. Under Horowitz's vote-pooling scenario, A and B will have to bid for the second preferences of C's supporters in order to win — which will, according to Horowitz, reward moderation. Lijphart argued that exactly the same argument can be made for a FPTP electoral system:

In the same example under FPTP rules, many of C's supporters will not want to waste their votes on C's hopeless candidacy, or may not even be able to vote for C at all because C wisely decides not to pursue a hopeless candidacy. Hence here too, A and B will have to appeal to C's supporters in order to win ... the votes instead of the second preferences of C's supporters would be traded. AV and FPTP provide exactly the same incentives (1991, 94).

This argument assumes that minor candidates will pull out of an electoral race when their low support levels become clear. While this may be a defensible premise in some (usually Western) scenarios, in situations of ethnically-based voting it is simply not realistic. In PNG, for example, many clans will put forward their own candidate for election, regardless of that candidate's chances of winning. Under FPTP this is indeed often a hopeless strategy, although justified in terms of the prestige and opportunity for social advancement associated with standing for political office. Under AV, by contrast, candidates from smaller clans (or those with a small home vote, such as expatriate candidates) were able to campaign outside their home area for other voters' second preferences, in the full knowledge that first preferences would mostly go to the 'local' clan candidate. In areas where there was no clear majority candidate, accommodative campaigning practices were encouraged by the need to garner second preferences which may be relatively small in number but could provide the necessary margin of victory. Sisk concurs with this assessment, arguing that Lijphart's equating of AV and FPTP

is premised on assumptions ... that do not always hold, especially given the emotional politics of divided societies. AV ... offers candidates an incentive to compromise that is lacking under first-past-the-post. Clearly, requiring a majority for election demands greater depth of support than does the plurality rule, and politicians would indeed have good reason to woo subsequent preference votes (Sisk 1993, 84).

The experience of preferential voting in Papua New Guinea, and the claims put forward for preferential voting in the Sri Lankan and Fijian contexts, suggest a need to look at preferential voting in a more expansive way than Lijphart and other commentators have attempted. In particular, the PNG case illustrates the differences between AV and FPTP

in situations of fragmented ethnic divisions. The evidence from PNG elections before and after the change of electoral system in 1975 suggests that AV probably mitigated some of the more extreme examples of vote-splitting and candidate multiplication common in PNG elections today. The contention that preferential voting encourages collaborative campaigning is also supported by some of the pre-1975 evidence from PNG. In this way, the PNG case provides evidence for the argument that the AV promotes accommodative political behaviour to a greater degree than FPTP, and provides important support for the Horowitz thesis.

Lijphart also takes issue with Horowitz's claim that AV mitigates the winner-take-all aspects of FPTP systems "and generally achieves better proportionality of seats to votes than plurality systems do" (Horowitz 1991a, 166). For evidence against this claim, Lijphart cites Rae's observation that AV behaves in all its particulars, including its degree of disproportionality, as if it were a FPTP system (Rae 1967, 108). Surprisingly, Lijphart does not quote much more recent evidence from his own work and that of others which shows that AV is considerably more proportional than most FPTP examples. In his book *Democracies*, Lijphart found that AV sat around mid-way on an index of disproportionality of electoral systems: it was as or more proportional than all non-PR systems such as FPTP or the double-ballot, but less proportional than all PR systems (1984, 160). More recently, Taagepera and Shugart found that Australia, the only AV example, had one-half to one-third the deviation from proportionality of most FPTP systems, and was actually more proportional than PR systems in Spain, South Korea and elsewhere (1989, 106-7). On these examples, Horowitz's claim that AV is more proportional than FPTP is entirely justifiable.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, AV is clearly less proportional than most forms of PR and has often been criticised by electoral reformists for this very reason. Enid Lakeman, for example, argued that AV results could be "nearly as unrepresentative as those of a British general election", giving the example of the 1948 AV election in the Canadian province of Alberta, at which the Social Credit party won a clean sweep of all seats with 58 percent of the total vote (1974, 63-64).

Discussion of proportionality in this context refers specifically to the seats-votes relationship: an electoral system is proportional to the extent that a party's share of the vote is matched by its share of the seats in parliament. For many, this has become the

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<sup>7</sup> But see Lijphart 1997 for a response to this argument.

pre-eminent criterion against which electoral systems should be judged. As Lijphart has put it, “there is wellnigh universal agreement that electoral proportionality is a major goal of electoral systems and a major criterion by which they should be judged”; particularly for supporters of PR systems it is “virtually synonymous with electoral justice” (1994, 140). Proportionality between votes and seats is often considered to be something of a *sine qua non* of electoral systems: Lijphart has summarised the case for PR as a “feeling that disproportional electoral results are inherently unfair and undemocratic” (1996, 176). Proportional election results are often considered to be particularly important for ethnically-divided societies because they enable minorities to be represented in the legislature and (through power-sharing arrangements) to take part in governing coalitions.

However, under certain conditions majoritarian systems can also produce proportional results. In an important article on the choice of electoral systems for southern Africa, Joel Barkan has argued that, particularly for agrarian societies in developing countries, the benefits often claimed for PR in terms of fairness of representation can be replicated, under conditions of regional aggregation of minority groups, by single-member majoritarian systems. Looking at the founding list PR elections held in Namibia (1989) and South Africa (1994), Barkan found that the proportional distribution of seats under PR would have been substantially the same if single-member districts had been used. This is because of a fundamental difference in voting patterns between agrarian village-based societies in developing countries and urban industrial societies in the West. In the latter, politics tends to be issue-based and characterised by a geographical dispersion of the vote. In the former, electors tend to vote in far more homogenous blocs for their ‘local’ candidate. Electoral boundaries that are drawn so as to encapsulate tribal groups can result in levels of proportionality roughly equivalent to those of PR systems, but with a far higher degree of contact between a representative and his or her constituents:

Voters in agrarian societies tend to vote in geographic blocs that are highly homogenous. As a result, it is not unusual for parties to obtain more than 90 percent of the vote in some areas and less than 10 or 15 percent in others. What appears from a distance to be a multiparty system is in actuality a collection of regional one-party systems ... The more agrarian the society, then, the higher the geographic concentration of the vote and the more closely the distribution of seats under [a single-member district] system will mirror the distribution of the total vote, as well as the distribution of seats that would be obtained under PR (Barkan 1995, 114).

All forms of PR require multi-member electorates of some type, meaning that there can be no single representative for each constituency. Barkan believes this lack of linkage



between representatives and constituents greatly reduces the prospects for democratic consolidation when PR systems are used in developing countries with large rural populations (1995, 107). While the true closeness of these links have often been overplayed in regards to the developed industrialised world, they retain a great degree of salience in many agrarian societies:

Because under the purest forms of PR legislative seats are allocated from party lists according to each party's proportion of the total national vote, individual MPs do not identify with, nor can they be held accountable to, the residents of a specific geographic constituency. Yet in agrarian societies, this lack of linkage between representatives and constituents greatly reduces the prospects for the consolidation of democratic rule ... In agrarian societies, people evaluate parties and candidates in terms of their potential for, or past record of, constituency service. Yet PR consistently frustrates such voter expectations. Not only are MPs not responsible for addressing the needs of specific localities, but their political careers depend primarily on satisfying their party's leadership, which determines their rankings on the party list for the next election (Barkan 1995, 107-8).

Barkan says that "the experience of southern Africa offers substantial evidence of PR's primary shortcoming, and has given rise to calls for the system's abolition or modification" (1995, 108). How far Barkan's arguments are applicable to a country like PNG, where most constituencies encapsulate a comparatively large number of small clan or tribal groups and where party identification does not appear to have a significant influence on voter behaviour, is difficult to say. Nonetheless, the wider point is clear: there are identifiable circumstances where PR may *not* be the most appropriate electoral system for a divided society, and where the accountability and access to political representation facilitated by single-member systems may be more appropriate devices for building sustainable democracy. It is worth recalling at this point that the Fiji CRC also considered, and rejected, PR electoral prescriptions as an option for the new 1997 Fijian Constitution. In keeping with Barkan's arguments, the CRC's major objection to PR was the lack of geographic accountability and effective representation provided by the system — because party-list PR systems necessarily treat provinces, regions or even a whole country as a single constituency, they "often fail to provide the important links between a voter and his or her member" (CRC 1996, 307).

This is also an issue of considerable importance to geographically large countries, where regional variations mean that some form of identifiable geographic representation is all but essential. If we take the ten largest 'established' democracies identified by Lijphart (forthcoming) in descending order of geographic size — Canada, the USA, Australia, India, Colombia, Venezuela, Botswana, France, Spain, and Papua New Guinea — it is

noteable that eight of the ten utilise some form of single-member district representation for their national elections, either via FPTP, AV, TRS or MMP systems (Colombia and Spain, which use list PR, are the only exceptions). If we look at transitional democracies, this trend is even clearer: while list PR has been the most popular choice for many new democracies, geographically large countries such as Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Mongolia have all chosen systems which incorporate single-member representation.

Single-member constituencies also enable electors to vote specifically for a candidate rather than a party's pre-assigned list of chosen candidates. One of the orthodoxies of much of the literature on electoral systems is the assumption of 'party identification' on the part of the electorate: that voters primarily identify with and vote for parties as their basic object of political loyalty. While such an assumption may hold true for Western democracies, in many non-Western cases the opposite is often truer: parties are built around dominant personalities, and voters cast their ballots predominantly for candidates, not parties. In some countries such as Uganda there is a mandated 'no party' system (Kasfir 1998); in others like PNG or the Solomon Islands, parties are so weak as to have little or no meaning and often campaign on essentially the same platform. Where the primary level of voter identification is with individuals rather than parties, list PR systems are not feasible, and consideration needs be given to systems that enable voters to express their political opinions for candidates instead.

This is not to argue that single-member methods such as AV will be superior to PR for all divided societies. The accommodation-inducing appeals of AV are based on the assumption that moderation on the part of political leaders will see them gain more secondary preference votes from other communities than the first-preference votes they may lose from their own group by appearing 'soft' on communal interests. This assumes that there is a portion of the electorate in which sufficient sentiment for moderation exists to make such strategies electorally appealing (Sisk 1995, 38). However, in very deeply-divided societies which have experienced extremely bitter ethnic antagonisms, this assumption may not hold. In cases involving genocidal inter-ethnic relations such as the 'ethnic cleansing' strategies employed by various groups in Bosnia or Rwanda, relations between the major ethnic groups are so deeply hostile that it is difficult to envisage conditions under which electors of one group would be

prepared to vote for candidates from another. In such cases, the only viable form of democracy may be a consociational one in which elections are contested overwhelmingly by ethnically-based parties, with minimal pre-election contact between competing parties and their supporters, and with any accommodation having to take place in negotiations between ethnic elites *after* the election rather than before. The problem with such an approach is that it assumes that elites are willing to be moderate, when much of the evidence from places like Bosnia tends to directly challenge such an assumption.<sup>8</sup>

There has been an ongoing debate amongst scholars of ethnic conflict as to the applicability of the various electoral engineering options to conflicts of different levels of intensity. On the one hand, advocates of consociationalism and list PR point to its use as a successful conflict-management tool in the divided societies of Western Europe, such as Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland — societies which have become less conflictual over the course of this century (Lijphart 1977). On the other, advocates of centripetal approaches point to the general failure of consociationalism in the developing world, arguing that it is precisely the low level of conflict in the divided societies of Western Europe which accounts for consociationalism's success there (Horowitz 1985, 571-72). The limited empirical evidence available suggests that centripetal approaches based on AV elections may work best in situations where there is a degree of fluidity to ethnic identities and relationships, while approaches based on consociationalism may be more appropriate for more intense inter-ethnic hostilities. Countries which have adopted AV electoral methods appear to be characterised by more moderate conflicts and/or more fluid group identities (such as those in PNG and Fiji), than those that have adopted list PR systems for transitional elections following intense conflicts (such as South Africa, Cambodia, Bosnia). This fits with the theoretical speculation that systems which require a degree of bargaining and cross-ethnic voting (such as AV) may be less realistic in extremely deeply-divided societies — where inter-

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<sup>8</sup> The experience of list PR in Bosnia is a good example of how proportionality itself will not encourage accommodation if other required characteristics are not present. In Bosnia, groups are represented in parliament in proportion to their numbers in the community as a whole, but because parties rely exclusively on the votes of members of their own community for their electoral success, there is little incentive for them to behave accommodatively on ethnic issues. In fact, the incentives are in the other direction: as it is easy to mobilise support by playing the 'ethnic card', the major parties in Bosnia have every incentive to emphasise ethnic issues and sectarian appeals. The result, at the 1996 Bosnian elections, was effectively an ethnic census, with electors voting along ethnic lines and each of the major nationalist parties gaining support almost exclusively from their own ethnic group.

ethnic bargains, if any, will have to be made by elites alone, elected proportionately by list PR systems — than in cases where there is a degree of fluidity to ethnic identities (Reilly and Reynolds, forthcoming).

A secondary weakness of AV is the way it can discriminate against third-placed parties or candidates. To give a simple example: in a situation where there are three major parties supported by three main ethnic groups, a candidate with 32 percent of the vote will be eliminated before other candidates with 33 and 35 percent. Tiny differences in vote share can result in major differences in the order of elimination and thus in determining successful candidates. While it could be argued that the preferences of the eliminated candidate will at least determine which of the remaining two wins the seat, this may be completely unsatisfactory in situations of ethnic division: in an extreme case one party or group may be left with no representation at all. This suggests that AV may not be a good choice for a country facing a three-way split between major ethnic groups. AV can also be as capricious as FPTP when dealing with a situation where one party is in a permanent minority, as Johnston has argued:

If one party has, say, forty percent of the first preference votes, but those who do not rank the party first rank it last, then it may fail to win any seats. This would only occur if it won forty percent of the votes in each constituency, of course, but the greater the number of constituencies in which it fell below fifty-percent in the first preferences, the greater the probability of it being underrepresented in the allocation of seats (1984, 63-64).

While this scenario does indeed highlight one of the disadvantages of AV, it also serves to illustrate precisely why preferential voting can exert a centripetal force on politics in divided societies. By providing incentives for parties to moderate their policies in the search for second preferences, AV encourages parties seeking to govern outright to move away from extreme positions and towards the policy centre. If a party has a solid support base of 40 percent but is ranked last by all other voters, then clearly it needs to examine the reasons that it so polarizes the electorate — why, for example, is it not picking up at least some second preferences? Such soul-searching may well lead to a recognition that a move towards the middle ground on some important issue is required to attract preferences if the party is to be electorally viable. Preferential voting also enables minority interests to swap lower-order preferences for policy influence. The ALP victory at the 1990 Australian federal election was dependent to a significant extent on the preferences it received from green voters in precisely this manner.

The arguments for and against AV are a good example of the contextual nature of electoral system design, and how proponents of different approaches run the risk of talking past each other. There is no perfect electoral system, and no ‘right’ way to approach the subject of electoral system design. The major criteria for designing electoral systems for all societies, not just divided ones, are sometimes in conflict with each other or even mutually exclusive. Devices which increase proportionality, such as increasing the number of seats to be elected in each district, will almost inevitably lessen other desirable characteristics, such as promoting geographic accountability between the electorate and the parliament. A tension also exists in the range of electoral system options for divided societies between systems which put a premium on *representation* of minority groups (such as list PR) and those which try to emphasise minority *influence* (such as AV). As Horowitz has noted, “measures that will guarantee representation to a given ethnic or racial group may not foster the inclusion of that group’s interest more broadly in the political process” (1991, 165). The best option, of course, is to have both: representation of all significant groups, but in such a way as to maximise their influence and involvement in the policy-making process. This goal is best achieved by building devices to achieve both proportionality and incentives for inter-ethnic accommodation into the electoral system itself. However, these goals are not always mutually compatible.

## Conclusion

Prescriptions for constitutional engineering via manipulation of electoral rules tend to be based on an underlying presumption of rational, self-interested behaviour on the part of political actors. Previous chapters of this thesis have demonstrated how the campaigning behaviour of PNG politicians and their supporters appears to have been influenced by the electoral system in place. The message of these chapters is that PNG politicians are no different to those elsewhere: they are rational actors who will respond to the incentives present under different electoral rules in order to facilitate their election. In the language of rational choice theory, they are self-interested utility maximisers. They will do what they have to do to win, and when the rules of the game change, many will change their behaviour accordingly. While a general finding that politicians want to win and hold on to power is a truism, this argument has a special significance when applied to the study of political behaviour in PNG, which — heavily

influenced by anthropology — has often focussed on the exotic or colourful examples of political behaviour as much as the rational. To give but a few examples: the discussions of the ‘election sickness’ that swept the Gadsup after the 1964 elections<sup>9</sup>; election-related cargo cult movements such as the Johnson cult<sup>10</sup>; the election of the cult leader Yaliwan at the 1972 elections (with a record 87 percent of the vote)<sup>11</sup>; and the persistence of candidates who contest elections without receiving a single vote (not even their own) at recent elections<sup>12</sup> are all examples of apparently non-rational behaviour on the part of PNG politicians and/or their supporters. But concentration on these incidents has tended to obscure what is an underlying rationality on the part of PNG’s political actors, who in most cases make rational responses to electoral incentives in search of victory. Tsebelis has argued that a successful rational-choice explanation of a political event “describes the prevailing institutions and context in which the actor operates, persuading the reader that she would have made the same choice if placed in the same situation” (1990, 44). This thesis is not a work in the rational choice genre, but the conclusions I draw are very similar to those of rational choice theory in comparative politics outlined by Tsebelis: if we can show that the behaviour of political actors is an optimal response to the institutional environment, it therefore follows that the prevailing institutions are to some degree responsible for the behaviour of these actors, and thus for political or social outcomes (Tsebelis 1990, 40).

This leads me to the core normative argument of this thesis: because political actors will respond to the rules of the game, and to the incentives or constraints inherent in these rules, so deliberate engineering of these rules can have a marked effect on political behaviour. The PNG comparison of an electoral system which acts as a zero-sum game (FPTP) compared to an electoral system which, under certain circumstances, acts as a positive-sum game (AV) illustrates this point quite well. As detailed in previous chapters, there is evidence that AV served to encourage co-operative and accommodative political strategies and behaviour. There is also evidence for the

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<sup>9</sup> See Watson 1964, 111.

<sup>10</sup> The Johnson cult was a well-publicised case at the 1964 elections where a significant number of electors on the island of New Hanover apparently wanted to vote for U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson rather than the local candidate. The villagers had apparently been told that they were free to nominate whoever they liked for election and, perhaps with the abundance of American wartime supplies and equipment in mind, chose to nominate President Johnson. See Hughes and van der Veur 1965, 403-4.

<sup>11</sup> For a good discussion of the Yaliwan case, see Winnett and May 1983, 255-67.

<sup>12</sup> This has occurred in each of the past three elections.

obverse: that is, when incentives for co-operation were removed, ethnic groups reverted to their traditional hostilities. This return to conflict appears to have been encouraged by incentives for non-accommodative behaviour inherent in the new FPTP electoral system, which rewarded vote-splitting and appears to have contributed to zero-sum campaigning styles. Attempts since 1975 to constrain these activities have generally proved unsuccessful: candidates have reacted to the incentives within FPTP by focusing their energies on maximising their clan-based vote and in many cases restricting the campaigning of opposition candidates to their own home areas. This has led to politicians being elected on increasingly small pluralities, and to ever-increasing numbers of candidates standing for election, as the higher the number of candidates, the smaller the total vote needed to gain a plurality and hence win the seat. These all represent 'rational' responses to the incentives provided by the FPTP electoral system.

The PNG experience of AV, by contrast, suggests that in ethnically-fragmented societies, centripetal electoral institutions can provide important incentives towards ethnic accommodation. This has clear implications for many other multiethnic societies searching for appropriate electoral institutions. As Esman has noted of ethnic politics in general,

Electoral systems in which politicians depend on votes only from coethnics tend to reward ethnic extremists who assert maximal demands. Systems in which politicians seeking election must appeal to members of more than a single ethnic community and depend on their electoral support generally produce more moderate politics and reward accommodative politicians with cross-ethnic appeals (1994, 258).

The evidence from PNG lends support to Esman: integrative electoral institutions did indeed appear to produce more moderate politics, in terms of campaigning behaviour at least, and rewarded those politicians who made cross-ethnic appeals. In addition, the Australian experience discussed earlier suggests that the use of AV there has encouraged a broad search for the political 'middle ground' by the major parties, as well as encouraging coalition arrangements and preference-swapping deals, and assisting the consolidation of a relatively stable party system. These are precisely the type of qualities that political engineers in other regions have identified as desirable. To give but two examples: Arturo Valenzuela has argued that what is most needed for democratic consolidation in Latin America "is an institutional context that encourages the formation of coalitions among parties and groups [and] the search for a majoritarian consensus that is so essential for governability in a highly variegated political society"

(1993, 14). Looking mostly at Africa, Larry Diamond has argued that the optimum political institutions for the consolidation of democracy include “settled and aggregative” party systems in which “one or two broadly-based, centrist parties fight for the middle ground” (1996, 239). The evidence from Australia in particular suggests that AV electoral arrangements have contributed to precisely these types of outcomes.

But Australian politics has not had to deal with the zero-sum implications of political competition that are a feature of deeply-divided societies, and consequently has largely been spared the necessity of designing moderating political institutions, or of examining the relationship between preferential voting and ethnic relations. As this thesis has attempted to demonstrate, this is not the case elsewhere. Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka and Fiji have all suffered violent ethnic conflicts which have prompted sustained examination of how adequately to represent diverse ethnic interests in divided societies. The ongoing debate about the appropriateness of electoral structures in these countries is thus directly related to serious questions about regime stability and performance: for example, PNG’s first prime minister, Michael Somare, has claimed that PNG’s FPTP electoral system is “the root cause of the country’s political instability” (‘Somare Calls for Reforms’, *Post Courier*, 4 May 1988). The failure of an electoral system to produce accommodative, effective and (perhaps) legitimate government is thus seen as an issue that goes beyond one of government function, to having wider implications for a country’s security, stability and long-term viability as a nation state. The comparative evidence presented in previous chapters suggests that by encouraging accommodation between competing groups, by encouraging moderation in policy positions and by increasing the influence of minorities, preferential voting may be a useful institutional instrument for assisting these aims.



## **Chapter Seven:**

### **Preferential voting in comparative perspective**

So far, this thesis has largely focussed upon the conflict-management potential of one preferential electoral system: the alternative vote. However, as defined at the start of this thesis, there are actually three different preferential voting systems used for national elections, consisting of two majority systems — the alternative vote and the contingent vote — plus the single transferable vote (STV) form of proportional representation. All three systems can themselves be further broken down into ‘compulsory preferential’ and ‘optional preferential’ versions, depending upon whether the decision to mark preferences beyond the first choice is left to the voter (as in most cases) or whether, as in Australia, it is a legislative requirement for a valid ballot that a complete rank-ordering of preferences for all candidates be expressed. Compulsory preferential AV is used for Australian federal elections to the House of Representatives and for Legislative Assembly elections in Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. The only national-level application of optional preferential AV was in PNG between 1964 and 1975. It was, however, also used as the electoral system for the 20 ‘white’ seats in Zimbabwe’s 1979 elections.<sup>1</sup> It was also used for elections to state and provincial parliaments in Australia and Canada earlier this century, and has more recently been adopted in the Australian states of New South Wales and Queensland.

All examples of the contingent vote (CV) to date have featured optional preference marking. The contingent vote was developed as a simple alternative to a two-stage run-off election and was first used in Queensland from 1892-1942. It was also used for Democratic primary elections in the American state of Alabama between 1915-1931 (where it was known as the ‘second-choice vote’) and, as detailed in Chapter Five, for presidential elections in Sri Lanka since 1978 (where it is known as the ‘preferential vote’). In 1993 it was also recommended as an alternative electoral system for Britain by the Labour Party’s Plant Commission, who (thinking they had invented a new electoral system) called it the ‘supplementary vote’. The system has thus been independently ‘invented’ on at least four separate occasions.

Finally, the Single Transferable Vote (STV) form of proportional representation is used today for elections in Ireland, Malta, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and the

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<sup>1</sup> See Sithole 1986, 77. Thanks to Andy Reynolds for bringing the Zimbabwean case to my attention.

Australian Senate, with only the latter making a complete expression of all preferences compulsory.<sup>2</sup> It has also been used in ‘one-off’ elections in Northern Ireland (where it is still used for local elections) and Estonia. While STV always utilises multi-member electoral districts, both AV and CV elections can be held in both single and multi-member districts, although the single-member version is much more common. Today, multi-member AV survives only in Nauru, and even there in an unusual form, and in state upper houses in Victoria and Tasmania, although it was also used (with spectacularly unsatisfactory results) in the Australian Senate from 1919 to 1946. When Queensland used CV, some two-member electorates were used alongside the more familiar single-member districts, although all other applications of the system appear to have occurred exclusively in single-member seats.

This combination of optional versus compulsory preference marking and single versus multi-member electoral districts at first glance presents a potentially confusing range of preferential voting alternatives, but in practice most jurisdictions make preference marking optional rather than compulsory, while almost all contemporary systems of preferential voting, with the exception of STV, utilise single-member rather than multi-member districts. A full typology of the national and state level usage of preferential electoral systems around the world is presented at Table 7.1.

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<sup>2</sup> In Tasmania, voters must express as many preferences as there are candidates to be elected (five per electorate).

**Table 7.1: A Typology of Preferential Electoral Systems**

Type of election	Single transferable vote	Contingent vote	Alternative vote (optional preferences)	Alternative vote (compulsory preferences)	Alternative vote in multi-member districts
National legislative elections (lower house)	Ireland 1922- Malta 1947- Estonia 1990 Northern Ireland 1973, 1982	-	Papua New Guinea 1964-1975  Zimbabwe 1979 (white seats only)	Australia 1918-	Nauru 1968-
National legislative elections (upper house)	Australia (Senate) 1949-	-	-	-	Australia (Senate) 1919-1946
National presidential elections	-	Sri Lanka 1978-	Ireland 1937-	-	-
State and provincial elections	Tasmania 1907-  Australian Capital Territory 1993-  New South Wales 1918-1926  New South Wales (Legislative Council) 1978-  Western Australia (Legislative Council) 1989-  South Australia (Legislative Council) 1982-	Queensland 1892-1942  New South Wales 1926-1928  Alabama 1915-1931	Queensland 1992-  New South Wales 1981-  Northern Territory 1980  Victoria 1911-1915  Western Australia 1907-1911*  Alberta 1926-1955  British Columbia 1952-1954  Manitoba 1927-1936	Victoria 1916-  Queensland 1962-1992  Western Australia 1912-  South Australia 1936-  New South Wales 1929-1980	South Australia 1929-1935  Victoria (Legislative Council) 1916-  Tasmania (Legislative Council) 1907-

Sources: Wright 1980; Crisp 1983, 137; Goot 1985; Jaensch 1995; Farrell, Mackerras and McAllister 1996; Corry and Hodgetts 1960. Note that Wright 1980 and Crisp 1983 both classify Western Australia 1907-1911 as using the contingent vote.

Interestingly, all of these system variations have been advocated, at various times, as the most appropriate electoral systems for divided societies. STV has attracted legions of admirers and many advocates of its suitability for multiethnic societies (e.g. the Street Royal Commission in Fiji), but has been introduced in relatively few cases. CV was, as

we have seen, introduced as part of Sri Lanka's 1978 constitutional settlement, and subsequently recommended by Horowitz as being particularly appropriate for divided societies elsewhere. Single-member AV has attracted a considerable degree of support in Papua New Guinea, and has recently been instituted as part of the constitutional settlement in Fiji. Finally, multi-member AV was recommended as the most appropriate system for post-apartheid South Africa by Horowitz, and also by the Fiji CRC, but was not instituted in either. Moreover, the question of optional versus compulsory preference marking has also been the subject of disagreement and debate amongst the various advocates of the different systems (Laponce 1957, CRC 1996, Punnett 1987). Despite this range of support for the different system variations, sustained examination of the theoretical and practical consequences of each system choice suggests that not all preferential systems are equally effective as instruments for encouraging moderation in divided societies. In particular, the consequences of the different forms of system structure all have significant impacts upon the efficacy of these systems as instruments of constitutional engineering. The following examination of the development and practical experience of these different system choices enables a sustained comparative examination of the relative performance of these different preferential systems.

### **The historical development of preferential voting**

Preferential voting evolved as a compressed form of two-round system (TRS) or 'runoff' election, which utilises a second round of voting if no candidate secures a majority in the first round. TRS elections have much older antecedents than preferential ones, being commonly used for parliamentary elections in many countries until the end of last century.<sup>3</sup> Speaking in 1891, Sir Samuel Griffith claimed that "the system of the second ballot is part of every democratic programme put forward in every country".<sup>4</sup> The system continues to be used today in France and countries associated with France, a number of former Soviet republics, and for presidential elections in many countries. The TRS has three central advantages in common with preferential voting procedures: it encourages candidates to broaden their support base in search of a majority; it limits

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<sup>3</sup> In Great Britain attempts were made in 1872 and 1882 to introduce the runoff; and it was briefly tried in New Zealand and New South Wales in the early part of this century. See Steed 1975, 40, 43.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Wright 1980, 58.

the impact of vote splitting; and it ‘manufactures’ majority support for one candidate or another. These factors together provide a powerful institutional incentive towards centrist politics — but, it must be noted, only in those cases where no candidate garners a majority in the first round. In such cases, the TRS forces both of the top two candidates from the first round of voting to broaden their appeal on partisan issues for the second-round runoff. When the runoff winner assumes office, this should lead to greater responsiveness and moderation on policy positions than would be the case if the winner had a plurality of votes alone. One of the most graphic examples of the ‘moderating’ impact of the TRS has been its use in combating the Ku Klux Klan in several American states:

The rise of the Ku Klux Klan in the South spurred interest in the runoff provision in at least one state as a way to consolidate anti-Klan voters behind a more moderate candidate in a second primary. If nominations were made simply by plurality vote, a candidate relying on the solid support of the Klan (or some other extremist group) could conceivably snatch victory from the hands of a crowded field of contenders — including some candidates more widely acceptable to the electorate — with only a small percentage of the total vote (Bullock and Johnson 1992, 6).

This quote also illustrates a second advantage of the TRS: it reduces the possibility of several candidates from similar support bases ‘splitting’ their vote between them. Diverse interests which competed with each other in the first round election can, if necessary, coalesce behind successful candidates in the lead up to the second round. The adoption of the TRS in Arkansas in 1924 was a reaction to the fear of splitting the anti-Klan vote in a straight plurality election contest (Bullock and Johnson 1992, 6). Of course, as pointed out earlier, if the original support base is so fractured that none of the candidates from that group make the runoff stage, then the vote-splitting advantage is negated. Nonetheless, a second round of voting almost always encourages bargains and trade-offs between parties and candidates. Sartori also praises the TRS as a “two-shot” system which enables voters to have a second choice or even change their mind between the first and second round (1994, 63). By contrast, a major disadvantage of TRS elections is the pressure they place on the electoral administration by having to run a second election a week or two after the first, thus increasing costs, instability and uncertainty (Reynolds and Reilly 1997, 44).

The final and most apparent advantage of the TRS is that it ensures whoever is elected will have received a mandate of an absolute majority of the voters. It is this advantage, so conspicuously absent from many FPTP elections, that encouraged 19<sup>th</sup> century

electoral reformers to think of ways of merging the advantages of the TRS in ensuring a majority victor with the simplicity of a single election. To do so required some method of rank-ordering candidates on the ballot, such as a systematic comparison of preference schedules. The possibilities of such aggregations of rank-orders was originally suggested by Charles de Borda in the eighteenth century in relation to decision-making procedures in assemblies and committees, but was vigorously criticised by one of the giants in the field of voting theory, the Marquis de Condorcet, when adopted in this form by the French in 1789 (McLean and Hewitt 1994, 45). As Rokkan has shown, the 'French method' of successive runoff elections was developed in response to the requirements of decision-making assemblies, which often needed to make choices between a number of alternatives via sequential runoff elections which were repeated successively until a majority winner was reached. Such a system thus entails an implicit rank-ordering of preferences (1968, 15). Such exhaustive repetition of runoff elections, sequentially eliminating lowest-placed candidates one-by-one until a majority winner is found, continues to be used in a number of such assemblies (the International Olympic Committee's means of choosing the venue for the Olympic Games being perhaps the best known of these). But it is an impractical method for mass-suffrage political elections, where a sequence of runoffs need to be compressed from several elections into one. The solution was what Rokkan described as "the great innovation" of British electoral reformers: the single transferable vote (1968, 15).

### **The Single Transferable Vote**

The first serious proposal for applying the preferential ballot to nationwide elections was put forward by Thomas Hare in 1856 as part of his manifesto for a new form of proportional representation, *The Election of Representatives, Parliamentary and Municipal*.<sup>5</sup> A classic product of Victorian liberalism, Hare's proposal for a 'single transferable vote' (STV) was publicly championed by his mentor John Stuart Mill, who called it "among the very greatest improvements yet made in the theory and practice of government" (McLean and Urken 1995, 46). The core principles of the system had been independently invented around the same time by Carl Andr  in Denmark. STV uses multi-member districts with voters ranking candidates in order of preference on the ballot paper (i.e. 1, 2, 3, etc.) in the same manner as the alternative vote. After the total

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<sup>5</sup> All references here are to the fourth edition: Hare 1873.

number of first preference votes are tallied, the count then begins by establishing the 'quota' of votes required for the election of a single candidate. Any candidate who has as many or more first preferences as the quota is immediately elected. If no-one has achieved the quota, the candidate with the lowest number of first preferences is eliminated with his or her second preferences being redistributed to the candidates left in the race. At the same time, the surplus votes of elected candidates (i.e. those votes above the quota), are redistributed according to the second preferences on the ballot papers. This process continues until all members have been elected.

The 'Hare system', as it was known, was to be much admired but much modified by future electoral reformers (such as, in Australia, Catherine Helen Spence and Andrew Inglis Clark) as they attempted to fashion a functioning electoral system from Hare's ambitious but impractical basic model. One of the few parts of Hare's original scheme for STV *not* to require modification was the idea of the *transferability* of preferential votes "from one candidate to another until it reaches a candidate whom the elector has named" (1873, 121-22). This transferability of votes from both excluded candidates and those elected candidates with a 'surplus' of votes formed a central part of Hare's new scheme for a nationwide system of proportional representation. From the outset, the proposal that votes should be transferable was criticised as being overly complex and beyond the understanding of ordinary voters (Hare 1873, viii). Hare saw it instead as a "vast augmentation of their electoral power" and criticised those who had argued that it was beyond the capacity of the average elector as being mischievous and patronising (1873, viii).

Like Mill, Hare was not reluctant to ascribe wider benefits to his electoral proposal, seeing it as "bringing to the duty of voting reflection, judgement and moderation" (1873, 122) which "by the opportunity the voting papers afford of separating, distinguishing, and bringing out every form of political opinion, will give an immeasurable increase of force and strength to the representative principle" (1873, 127). This polemic approach to STV continued into the academic study of electoral systems in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Taagepera and Shugart see the "missionary zeal of early twentieth-century electoral reformers" as having stunted the growth of genuinely comparative research on the subject of electoral systems, defining the debate as increasingly an argument between the proponents and opponents of proportional representation in

general, and its STV variant in particular (1989, 49-50). Even more recent descriptive works such as (in Great Britain) Bogdanor's *What is Proportional Representation?* (1984) and Farrell's *Comparing Electoral Systems* (1997) or (in Australia) Wright's *Mirror of the Nation's Mind* (1980), are unable to escape the lure of becoming implicitly (or in Wright's case explicitly) advocates of STV.

Although many aspects of Hare's original STV scheme were found to be impractical for mass elections, and were subsequently abandoned or re-fashioned, the idea of granting each voter as much individual say as possible via a new form of ballot structure was quickly grasped as a significant technical innovation by many commentators. It was a useful institutional expression of many of the ideals in vogue amongst British liberals in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as the growing acceptance amongst elites that people behaved in politics as rational individuals, forming their own opinions and considering their own interests, and that such diversity of opinion between thinking individuals was to be encouraged rather than repressed. In short it was, as Birch has noted, a logical expression of the individualist philosophy of Victorian liberalism<sup>6</sup>, and Mill's "virtual intoxication with Hare's scheme" (Hart 1995, 55) was the most striking example of the way in which the system's institutional arrangements were seen as being an embodiment of the liberal ideals of the time.

While STV has long been advocated by political scientists as one of the most attractive electoral systems, its use for national parliamentary elections has been limited to a few cases — Ireland (since 1921), Malta (since 1947), and once in Estonia in 1990. The system is also used in Northern Irish local elections, and in Australia for elections to the Tasmanian House of Assembly, the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly, and the federal Senate. As a mechanism for choosing representatives, STV is perhaps the most sophisticated of all electoral systems, allowing for choice between parties and between candidates within parties. The final results also retain a fair degree of proportionality, and the fact that in most actual examples of STV the multi-member districts are relatively small means that an important geographical link between voter and representative is retained. Furthermore, voters can influence the composition of post-election coalitions (as has been the case in Ireland) and the system provides incentives for inter-party accommodation via the reciprocal exchange of preferences.

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<sup>6</sup> For a discussion see Birch 1964, 63-64.



STV also provides a better chance for the election of popular independent candidates than list PR, because voters are choosing between candidates rather than between parties (although a party-list option can be added to an STV election, as is done for the Australian Senate). However, the system is often criticised on the grounds that preference voting is unfamiliar in many societies, and demands, at the very least, a degree of literacy and numeracy. The intricacies of an STV count are themselves quite complex, which is also seen as being a drawback. STV also carries the disadvantages of all parliaments elected by PR methods, such as increasing the power of small minority parties under certain circumstances. Moreover, STV can provide pressures for political parties to fragment internally, because at election time members of the same party are effectively competing against each other, as well as the opposition, for votes.

*STV in divided societies: Northern Ireland and Estonia*

Some scholars have also argued that STV is the best electoral system for ethnically-divided societies, as “political considerations can gradually assume more importance and racial ones less, without the elector ever being faced with a conflict of loyalties” (Lakeman 1974, 136). However, the use of STV in divided societies to date has been limited, inconclusive and generally not supportive of this argument. Two ethnically-divided states have utilised STV for ‘one-off’ national elections: Northern Ireland in 1973 (and again in 1982), and Estonia in 1990. In both cases, little vote-pooling or accommodation on ethnic issues took place. In Northern Ireland, STV was deliberately introduced as part of a power-sharing formula for elections to a Northern Ireland legislature as part of the British governments attempts at relinquishing ‘home rule’ and devolution.<sup>7</sup> At the 1973 elections to the abortive Northern Ireland Assembly, most parties neither campaigned for nor received votes across the Protestant-Catholic divide, in part “because the chances of winning an extra seat by adding a few votes from the other community were much less than the chances of losing votes by appearing ‘soft’” on key sectarian issues (Rose 1976, 78). The 1973 election results represented a decisive rebuff to moderation, and it was estimated that less than 0.25 percent of vote transfers crossed the sectarian divide.<sup>8</sup> Similar sectarian voting patterns were evident in 1982. In both elections, there was no campaign for preferences between the two major

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<sup>7</sup> Northern Ireland has also used STV for local elections (since 1973), for the 1975 Constitutional Convention election, and for European Parliament elections since 1979.

<sup>8</sup> See Dixon 1997, 5.

groups, no vote-pooling, and no accommodation. In both 1973 and 1982, attempts at electing a centrist legislature actually went in the other direction: the dearth of ‘middle ground’ between the unionist and republican representatives saw the power-sharing experiment collapse almost before it had begun.

In Estonia, which is similarly divided between the majority local Estonian (60 percent) community and a minority (35 percent) immigrant Russian one, STV was used for the first national independence elections in 1990 before being replaced with list PR. Again, ethnicity appeared to be the dominant factor in voter choice at these elections.<sup>9</sup> Russian electors, for example, voted predominantly for liberal democratic ‘Russian’ parties, but their second preferences “went overwhelmingly to reactionary imperialist Russian candidates rather than liberal but ethnically Estonian ones. Likewise, voters with Estonian first preferences continued with Estonian names” (Taagepera 1996, 31). The elected parliament, with a majority of ethnic Estonians, also exhibited little in the way of inter-ethnic accommodation, passing legislation that disenfranchised non-citizens and required Estonian language competence as the basis of citizenship and employment rights.

Both the Northern Ireland and Estonian cases lend support to theoretical speculation that the threshold for winning a seat in a multi-member STV districts may be too low to ensure that incentives for preference-swapping influence party campaign strategies (Horowitz 1991a, 191). For example, even for the minimum realistic district size under STV — a three-member constituency — the threshold for election is only 25 percent, a level easily reached without vote pooling by the major ethnic groups in both Northern Ireland and Estonia, both of which feature ‘bi-polar’ splits between two large and relatively cohesive ethnic groups. The lack of inter-ethnic preference transfers at STV elections in both Northern Ireland and Estonia, and the non-accommodative policies pursued by elected governments in both cases, undermines claims for the accommodative effects of STV in such cases, as there were few districts where the relative size of the groups did not exceed the required quota for election under STV.

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<sup>9</sup> See Taagepera 1990, 303-11.

## The Alternative Vote

The alternative vote was developed as an adaptation of STV so as to enable its use in single-member rather than multi-member electorates. It had been pointed out as early as 1863 that Hare's original STV proposal made elections in single-member districts all but impossible due to the overly high quota for election in Hare's version (McLean and Urken 1995, 46-47). The next step was to find a way of reworking the preferential mechanics proposed by Hare into a practical package for the election of a single member. Although the essentials of the system were originally proposed (and dismissed) by Condorcet, the first documented example of such a method appears to have been carried out by Professor W.R. Ware of Harvard University in 1871. In a letter to Hare (published as Appendix M to the fourth edition of *The Election of Representatives* under the heading 'The Preferential Vote') Ware detailed the efficacy of Hare's method when used for a mock election by Harvard students to select their four favourite writers (Shakespeare winning handsomely) (Hare 1873, 351-55). Ware also showed that Hare's method could be utilised to fill casual vacancies (and thus obviate the need for by-elections) by re-examining the ballots cast for a retiring member and distributing the second and later preferences accordingly.<sup>10</sup> Ware used this example to show that "contrary to the generally received opinion, the system of preferential voting is applicable to the choice of a single candidate" (Hare 1873, 353). What Ware's experiment demonstrated was that, where no candidate has an absolute majority, the sequence of elimination of the lowest-placed candidate and the transfer of his or her votes to continuing candidates could work as well for single-member elections as for Hare's more complex scheme of proportional representation: thus the alternative vote was born.

While the significance of this advance appeared to be lost on Hare (who thought it demonstrated the applicability of preferential voting to school education classes) (1873, v), it was recognised as a potentially significant practical advance by E.J. Nanson, the Professor of Mathematics at Melbourne University from 1875-1922 and an influential campaigner for electoral reform in Australia and internationally. In 1882 Nanson published a pamphlet explaining the mechanics of the 'Ware method' as he called it, which he praised for its lack of susceptibility to strategic voting and for its relative

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<sup>10</sup> This is how casual vacancies are filled under the Hare-Clark system used in Tasmania.

simplicity, making it “extremely suitable for political elections” (Nanson 1995). By the late 1890s, with the framing of the Australian constitution in progress, Nanson concentrated his efforts on influencing the choice of electoral system for the new federal parliament. It was clear that political pressures would ensure that the House of Representatives would utilise single-member electoral districts, and Nanson was at pains to ensure the selection of AV, which he saw as being “far superior” to other single-member systems (he also campaigned unflinchingly for the adoption of STV in the Senate, which would have been his favoured system for the House of Representatives were multi-member electorates to be utilised). In a series of articles in the *Age* and *Argus*, collectively published in 1900 under the title *The Real Value of a Vote and How to Get it at the Coming Federal Elections*, Nanson emphasised “the absolute necessity of insisting that no candidate be elected in a single electorate unless he poll an absolute majority of the votes”, initially advocating the contingent vote, as used in Queensland (1900, 10). Intriguingly, Nanson claimed that “there is nothing new in preferential or contingent voting. This method was used in France and Switzerland 130 years ago” — a claim which presumably refers to Condorcet’s writings, which Nanson was known to have read. However, Nanson went on to emphasise that even better than the contingent vote was a procedure which entailed an exhaustive use of preferences — in other words, the alternative vote, a system which was, at that time, unused anywhere in the world (1900, 7, 12).

Following the successful federation of the Australia colonies in 1901, Nanson’s proposals had a significant influence upon the first Electoral Bill presented to the new Commonwealth Parliament in 1902, which provided for AV in the House and proportional representation in the Senate. The government’s stated aim in introducing AV was “to bring out in the most certain way possible the choice of the majority of the electorate”. The progressive lineage of the proposed systems was clear from the ensuing parliamentary debates: references to John Stuart Mill, Thomas Hare, Helen Spence, Nanson and Andrew Inglis Clark were made by both supporters and opponents of the bill. As it was, the conservative opponents emerged victorious: both AV in the House and STV in the Senate were deleted during the passage of the bill, to be replaced with the safe options of FPTP and the Block Vote (i.e. FPTP in multi-member constituencies) respectively. According to Reid and Forrest, with the wisdom of hindsight

it is easily seen now that the major proposals of 1902 were decades ahead of their time ... it took seventeen years, until 1919, before the contingent (preferential) method of voting for the House of Representatives with single-member divisions was acceptable; and it took almost fifty years, until 1948, before the Parliament finally accepted a brand of proportional representation for the Senate's State-wide, multi-member electorates. In both cases the reforms came not as a result of the pursuit of principles of electoral justice, put from pragmatic considerations of party gain (1989, 99).

The first attempt at resurrecting AV came before the third federal election in 1906 when protectionist Prime Minister Alfred Deakin wrote to his Labor counterpart, Chris Watson, suggesting a deal to isolate the free-trade forces of George Reid:

Have you thought of the exhaustive ballot — compulsory voting for every candidate. The lowest dropped out & his votes divided until someone gets a majority. With this our candidate & yours could not do each other anything like so much harm & and one or others of us would win in several Reidite constituencies. Of course it must be compulsory voting for all candidates. It would be a great safety valve for both of us. What do you think? (Reid and Forrest 1989, 114).

Watson, whose Labor Party was the clear beneficiary of vote-splitting amongst the non-Labor candidates, was not interested. The Deakin government introduced another bill for AV in August 1906, but it lapsed with the Parliament's dissolution. A Liberal private member's bill in 1911 met a similar fate (Reid and Forrest 1989, 115).

It was not until 1918 that AV was finally introduced for federal elections to the House of Representatives (1919 for the Senate), after having previously been introduced at the state level by Liberal governments in Western Australia (1907) and Victoria (1911). At the federal level, the increasing incidence of minority Labor candidates beating a divided field of conservatives prompted Sir Joseph Cook's short-lived Liberal government (1913-14) to appointed a royal commission into electoral matters, which recommended that AV and STV be used for elections to the House of Representatives and Senate respectively. After Cook's defeat, the issue lay dormant until 1917 when the newly-formed Nationalist Party, under the leadership of W.M. Hughes, was able to form a governing majority. Under considerable pressure from the farming lobby, which threatened to split the Nationalist Party's vote by standing its own candidates, the Hughes government introduced full preferential AV for the House and passed the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*, a piece of legislation which, while much amended, remains the statute governing electoral competition at the national level today. The introduction of AV was thus intimately related to the need to counter the possibilities of vote-splitting and to encourage and reward collaboration or coalition arrangements

between parties.<sup>11</sup> For most of this century, AV has had two main positive effects for the non-Labor parties: it has facilitated the coalition arrangement between the Liberal and Country (now National) parties by enabling them both to stand candidates in some seats without the danger of vote splitting, and it has enabled the preferences of one small party, the Democratic Labor Party, to flow predominantly against the ALP and hugely assist the Coalition maintain government in the 1960s. In the 1970s, the ALP advocated a return to FPTP. But when the ALP regained office in 1983, its policy was to retain AV, but make the expression of preferences optional rather than compulsory.

### *Optional preferential AV*

Optional preferential AV is, as described earlier, identical to full preferential AV except that voters are not required to express a preference for every candidate; if they wish, they can express a preference for only one. In the words of former Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, optional preferential AV is “perhaps the only electoral procedure in the world which allows electors to express their indifference to candidates” (1985, 679).<sup>12</sup> A national survey in 1979 showed that the majority of Australian electors favoured optional AV, with 72 percent preferring the optional version and only 26 percent favouring compulsory preference marking (Hughes 1990, 141). One clear advantage of leaving the decision to mark preferences beyond the first in the hands of the voter is that the problems of spoilt ballots due to numbering errors associated with the full preferential system are largely removed. For this reason, the optional version is probably the only form of preferential voting suited to conditions of low literacy or numeracy.

Optional preferential AV was first used earlier this century for elections to Australian state lower houses in Western Australia and Victoria and in the Canadian provinces of Alberta, Manitoba and British Columbia. In all of these cases it was abandoned — for full preferential AV in Australia, and for FPTP in Canada — after voters increasingly used their vote to ‘plump’ for one candidate rather than expressing preferences, thus effectively turning the election into a FPTP contest (Corry and Hodgetts 1960, 272). There were also several unsuccessful attempts to introduce optional preferential AV to

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<sup>11</sup> See Graham 1962, 164–81.

<sup>12</sup> Whitlam was presumably unaware of approval voting, in which voters mark their ballots only for those candidates they ‘approve’ of.

New Zealand in the early part of this century. The short-lived Mackenzie government of 1912 introduced a bill to do so, but it lapsed with the defeat of the government after only 15 weeks in office, and further attempts in 1923 and 1938 met similar fates (Royal Commission on the Electoral System 1986, 31, A-56). More recently, optional preferential AV has been introduced for state elections in New South Wales (in 1981) and Queensland (1992) — in the latter case on the recommendation of the Electoral and Administrative Review Commission, who considered that compulsory preferential voting forced voters to express preferences for candidates about whom they may know little or nothing (1990, 59). The rate of ‘plumping’ in both these cases has tended to increase over time. Voters’ expression of preferences also appears to be closely related to the recommendations made by parties on their ‘how-to-vote’ cards. In a survey conducted at two by-elections in 1992, fully 75 percent of electors followed party voting directions, resulting in plumping rates of 43 percent in one district (Gordon) and 63 percent in another (Kuring-gai). In the Kuring-gai case, less than 33 percent of electors filled in all squares on the ballot paper.<sup>13</sup> In Queensland, plumping rates stood at 23 percent at the first optional preferential AV election in 1992, but were significantly higher in those seats where how-to-vote material from one of the major parties did not suggest marking preferences (Electoral Commission Queensland 1995, 14). There is also a clear partisan component to plumping rates which reflects the long-standing coalition arrangements between the Liberal and National parties: in both New South Wales and Queensland, Labor voters are considerably more likely to ‘plump’ than supporters of the coalition parties (Lucy 1982, 105).

At the federal level, Labor traditionally opposed preferential voting of any sort, seeing it (correctly) as a means by which the non-Labor forces were able to aggregate their vote shares to defeat Labor candidates. Until 1974, Labor was actually committed to a change to a FPTP system, but this was changed by Whitlam to in-principle support for optional preferential AV. In 1983 the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Electoral Reform recommended the introduction of optional preferential AV for all future federal elections in Australia. This recommendation was not accepted by the Hawke government, principally because without a majority in the Senate, the government knew that it had little hope of forcing through any change. This proved to be a fortunate

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<sup>13</sup> Personal communication, State Electoral Office of New South Wales, 12 July 1996.

outcome: as new issues on the left of the political spectrum such as environmentalism became increasingly prominent, so the second and later preferences of voters supporting minor parties drifted increasingly to Labor. The ALP consequently changed its official policy in 1991 to support “full preferential voting for all elections for lower houses of Parliament” (Australian Labor Party 1991). Recent electoral history has thus emphasised the truth of Richard Rose’s dictum that, once chosen, electoral rules tend to persist by their own inertia: legislatures are almost always the product of the existing system and tend to be wary of the uncertain ramifications of change.<sup>14</sup>

### *The Alternative Vote in the UK*

This golden rule of electoral reform was evidenced also by the case of the near-adoption of AV in the United Kingdom in 1918. The most interesting aspect of the pro-AV case in Britain is how closely the progress of the debate matches the Australian experience, both chronologically and in substance. As in Australia, the key motivator for change was the perceived danger of vote-splitting under FPTP. In Britain in 1903, the Liberal government came to an agreement with the new Labour Party not to encroach upon the other’s electoral territory. While this pact, known as the Gladstone-MacDonald agreement, worked reasonably well, it soon became clear that it was not an arrangement that could last indefinitely, and that the Liberals would have to consider AV “if they were not to hand a number of seats to the unionists on a split vote” (Bogdanor 1981, 121). Like their counterparts in Australia, the British Liberals established a Royal Commission on Electoral Systems; its report released in 1910 recommended the adoption of AV but made little impact, and was not debated in either house of parliament. Support for AV, however, remained widespread if not constant: in 1912 the first draft of the Liberal government’s abortive franchise bill provided for its adoption, and only a shortage of parliamentary time saw it omitted from the final bill introduced to the Commons. The bipartisan Speaker’s Conference of 1916-17, which grappled with numerous issues of electoral reform, made a majority recommendation that AV be adopted in all non-borough constituencies, about two-thirds of all electorates. The government refused to accept this recommendation and moved a free vote on the choice of electoral system, with the majority of the Commons in favour of AV but the House of

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<sup>14</sup> See Rose 1983, 42-43.



Lords committed to STV. The end result was a stalemate between the two houses and the maintenance of FPTP — to the historical cost of both the Labour and Liberal parties.

Since the emergence of a disciplined party system in Britain after 1918, a calculation of likely partisan impacts has been the dominant criterion by which political parties have assessed proposals for electoral reform. Another attempt by the minority Labour government (with Liberal support) to introduce AV in 1931 met with a similar lack of success when a Commons vote to change to AV was subsequently blocked in the Lords, after Winston Churchill had derided AV as “the worst of all possible plans” which guaranteed an outcome “determined by the most worthless votes given to the most worthless candidates” (*Hansard*, 2 June 1931). In 1958, by contrast, concern that a rise in the number of Liberal candidates would split the anti-Labour vote prompted a flurry of interest in the system from Conservatives, who saw it as “a mechanism by which the Tory-preferring middle vote would not be ‘wasted’” (Steed 1975, 50).

It is clear that the major reason AV was not adopted in Great Britain was because of this mutual antipathy from supporters of the status quo on the one hand and the PR proponents on the other. The result for most of this century has been a proliferation of vote-splitting, both accidental and deliberate. The effects of this phenomenon on electoral results should not be under-estimated. Research from the early 1990s suggests that, in recent British elections, the selected *withdrawal* by one of the main opposition parties (then Labour and Liberal Democrat) of their nominated candidate in selected constituencies would have allowed the remaining candidate to beat the Conservative; and that the effective use of such strategies could be enough to change government. A party can theoretically increase its likelihood of participating in government by selectively withdrawing some of its candidates — a fact which surely represents “one of the more bizarre properties of the first-past-the-post voting system” (Sharp 1997, 129). Given this state of affairs, it is not surprising that electoral reform is back on the political agenda in the United Kingdom. Following its election in 1997, the Blair Labour government pledged to hold a referendum on electoral reform during its first term of office. Some sources have argued that AV is the only feasible electoral reform likely to be acceptable to both the British general public and incumbent MPs:

It is fairer than Britain’s current voting system, because it means that MPs will generally have the support of at least half their voters, and not just a plurality of them. It will make it even harder for any government to win an overall majority when it has only an overall minority of votes. But it

retains many of the virtues of the current system. It is nearly as simple. It still allows each MP individually to represent an individual constituency, which is good for them and good for their constituents. It does not require a leap in the dark to an entirely new system with unpredictable social and political consequences (*The Economist*, 28 October 1995).

At the time of writing, Blair was reported to favour AV over FPTP, despite opposition from colleagues in favour of the status quo (*The Guardian*, 4 June 1996). Blair has not revealed his favoured choice openly, but is on record as stating that an electoral system must “aggregate opinion without giving disproportionate influence to splinter groups” — a succinct description of one benefit of AV (*The Economist*, 14 September 1996). The only prediction on the future of Britain’s electoral arrangements which can be made with confidence is that partisan interest, as ever, will be the determining factor behind any change.

### *AV in multi-member districts*

Outside of the case of Nauru mentioned earlier (which has no political parties and is really too small to facilitate useful comparison), the only national example of the use of AV in multi-member districts was in the Australian Senate between 1919 and 1946. Under this system, three members were elected from each of the six states at regular ‘half-Senate’ elections held every three years. This experience graphically illustrated the dangers of using a majority electoral system in a situation which demands a proportional one. When AV is used in multi-member districts, the majoritarian features of the system become overwhelming. In order to utilise AV in multi-member districts, each Senate seat was effectively filled by a separate election, but with the same electorate voting at each. Because of the stability of party support in the electorate, this procedure displayed a strong tendency to produce an outcome under which the same party grouping won every seat in a state. Of the 60 occasions on which a state-based Senate election was held under multi-member AV, 55 produced such an outcome. The system’s configuration meant that it gave virtually no encouragement to minor parties to participate in Senate elections. At House of Representatives elections during the same period, it was from time to time possible for party dissidents to win election as independents or as representatives of new parties, particularly if they had a geographically-concentrated base of support: 33 such candidates were elected at general elections from 1919 to 1946. At Senate elections, however, the use of entire states as electorates saw these pockets of support swamped, excluding minor party representation completely. This created periods of such sustained and nationwide dominance by one

party that on a number of occasions the Senate was scarcely workable as a legislative body, let alone as a house of review: in the period from 1947 to 1950, for example, there were only three opposition Senators — a leader, a deputy leader, and a whip — facing 33 government Senators.

This level of system dysfunction and extreme disproportionality meant that the electoral system itself was primarily responsible for the erosion of public confidence in, and the legitimacy of, half the federal Parliament; some have argued that it increased popular opposition to any strengthening of the federal government's powers.<sup>15</sup> Multi-member AV was replaced with STV in 1948 which, having been designed for multi-member constituencies, has operated in a far more logical way. The inappropriateness of multi-member AV evidenced by the case of the Australian Senate was such that no proposal for multi-member AV has ever again been forthcoming in Australia.

Given the extremely lop-sided and disproportional election results that multi-member AV delivered, it is highly likely that the system would be even more damaging in an ethnically-divided society, as it could result in ethnic minorities being excluded completely from parliamentary representation. Nonetheless, in recent years several proposals featuring multi-member AV have been advanced by constitutional engineers as part of an institutional package for democracy in divided societies. In 1991, Horowitz proposed that multi-member AV may have to be used to ensure sufficient electorate-level heterogeneity in the case of South Africa, and it is notable that most critiques of his proposal focused on the unworkability of multi-member AV as one of their major criticisms.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the Fiji CRC's recommendation that 45 seats in the Fijian parliament be elected from 15 three-member constituencies was widely criticised by electoral system scholars, who pointed to the inequitable results delivered at Australian Senate elections under precisely this configuration.<sup>17</sup> As noted earlier, the multi-member AV recommendations were dropped from the final draft of the 1997 Constitution, and replaced with single-member AV for all electorates.

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<sup>15</sup> See Goot 1985, 226.

<sup>16</sup> See Lijphart 1991; Reynolds 1995; Lijphart 1997.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Reilly 1997c.

## The Contingent Vote

The most obscure and poorly-understood form of preferential voting electoral system is the contingent vote (CV). Put simply, the CV is a two-round runoff election compressed into one round via the expression of second and later preferences. Under this system, any candidate who receives an absolute majority of first preferences is declared elected. If no candidate has an absolute majority, all candidates other than the two leaders on first preferences are eliminated, and the votes for eliminated candidates are re-distributed to one or the other of the top two, according to the preferences marked, to ensure a majority winner. This method was used in Queensland from 1892-1942, in Alabama from 1915-1931, and in Sri Lanka since 1978. Nonetheless, the contingent vote remains virtually unknown, even in academic circles. The following sections trace the history of the development of the system since its adoption in Queensland and Alabama earlier this century.

### *Queensland*

The first occasion on which the CV was used for legislative elections appears to have been in Queensland in 1892, after the conservative government of Sir Samuel Griffith (who went on to become one of the primary drafters of the Australian constitution) proposed that a two-round runoff be introduced for Queensland elections so that all winners would enjoy clear majority support. In 1891 a member of the Queensland Legislative Assembly, A.H. Barlow, argued for the advantages of compressing the two rounds of voting into a single election, proposing that in those districts where no candidate received a majority of first-round votes, “all candidates but the two with the highest totals of votes should be excluded and the votes of their supporters should be transferred to either of the two top candidates for whom the voters had shown preferences” (Wright 1980, 58). This system was consequently used for 18 state elections until 1942, in a mixture of single-member and two-member electorates. The expression of ‘contingent’ preferences was not compulsory, and voters could number as many preferences as they wished. New South Wales also experimented with the contingent vote at one election, in 1927, before adopting AV.

The CV appears to have been introduced by a conservative government in an attempt to avoid splitting the non-Labor vote in the face of a growing and disciplined Labor Party — the same essential reason behind the introduction of the alternative vote for federal

elections in Australia in 1918.<sup>18</sup> Ironically, it was a Labor government that abandoned the CV in favour of FPTP in 1942, after concern at the appearance of splinter groups within its own ranks and the loss of the safe seat of Cairns at a by-election when preferences from the non-Labor side were successfully directed towards an independent Labor candidate.<sup>19</sup> A hypothetical example of how the system works in a four-candidate contest with two major-party candidates and two minor candidates is given in Table 7.2. The contingent vote enables the Liberal and Independent Liberal candidates to defeat a Labor candidate who would have won under first-past-the-post.

**Table 7.2: A Hypothetical Example of the Contingent Vote (1)**

Candidate	First count	Second count	Result
Independent labor	600	Eliminated — all second preferences to Labor	
Independent liberal	2000	Eliminated — 1 600 second preferences to Liberal; 400 to Labor	
Liberal	3500	3500+ 1600 = 5100	<b>Liberal elected</b>
Labor	3900	3900 + 600+ 400= 4900	
Total votes	10 000	10 000	
Majority needed to win	5 001	5 001	

### *Alabama*

The short-lived experience of the contingent vote in the U.S. state of Alabama between 1915 and 1931 had its origins in the Democratic Party's first experience of a two-round runoff primary election in 1914, in which there was a steep drop in turnout at the second-round runoff election.<sup>20</sup> In a bid to overcome this problem it was decided to compress the two-stage process into one election via a system of 'second-choice' votes, which would be counted to determine the outcome if no candidate received a majority of 'first-choice votes' (the idea was apparently borrowed from a similar system briefly in use in Florida). Several reasons were advanced for the change: the cost of holding the second-round election, the low turnout of voters in the second-round, and the

<sup>18</sup> See Graham 1962.

<sup>19</sup> Queensland adopted the alternative vote in the 1960s, and in 1991 changed to an optional rather than compulsory expression of preferences.

<sup>20</sup> Thanks to Paul Wilder for pointing out the significance of the Alabama case and for providing the article on which this account is based: Brewer 1993.

desirability of requiring the winning candidate to receive a majority of the vote. As it was, the expected increase in voter participation under the new system did not eventuate: in 1918, for example, only about 20 percent of electors cast a 'second-choice' vote. With mounting criticism from some quarters that the system was iniquitous, the 1926 gubernatorial primary saw a candidate win with less than 29% of first- and second- choice votes. This was the final straw: a system which was supposed to guarantee majority victory had dramatically failed to do so. Alabama returned to a two-round runoff in 1931.

### *The Plant Commission Proposal*

The contingent vote was effectively a 'dead' electoral system until its revival by Sri Lankan constitutional drafters in 1978. However, the system gained considerable publicity in Britain in 1993 when it was recommended by the Labour Party's Plant Commission as a reform to Britain's existing FPTP system. According to media reports, this system was devised by Labour MP Dale Campbell Savours as a clever compromise between a two-round runoff and the full alternative vote. The Plant Commission called this new system the 'supplementary vote', describing it as an achievable change to the British FPTP system which would temper some of the more extreme results of the existing system and would be "practical, straightforward and comparatively modest" (1993, 21). Most observers were far less kind. David Butler called it "silly answer" which "has probably set back the cause of electoral reform" (1993, 77-79). Others of the left and the right variously described it as a "half-baked compromise" and "the worst option" (*The Guardian*, 2 April 1993, 20) which would encourage tactical voting (Georghiou 1993, 82) and could actually produce more disproportional results than FPTP (Wainwright 1993, 79). While these were serious charges, they were not necessarily fatal: the cause of electoral reform in Britain has long been caught between the defenders of the *status quo* on one side and enthusiasts for radical reform on the other. More telling perhaps for the credibility of the proposal was the charge that it was, to quote Pippa Norris, 'a new system which had never been used elsewhere' (1995, 82). Former Conservative MP Keith Best described it as 'an idea dreamed up by a Labour MP which is not in existence anywhere in the world: it has no record' (1993, 80). Despite what appears to be a widespread acceptance of their veracity, these claims are of course quite incorrect.

### *The Effects of the Contingent Vote*

It is difficult to make many generalisations about the effects of the contingent vote from the limited practical experience of the system to date. A common strategy has been to adopt the CV in the hope of marginalising the electoral prospects of third parties, such as the rising Labor Party in Queensland or the Liberal Democrats in the United Kingdom. More recently, an awareness of the need to encourage majority victors with broad nationwide support for the new office of executive president prompted Sri Lanka to adopt the contingent vote. In Queensland, the longest running example of CV to date, the system was introduced by one government when it was seen as being to their political advantage, and abolished by another for the same reason. The central issue was the question of vote-splitting — i.e. the endemic problem under FPTP of several candidates with similar support bases ‘splitting’ their support between them, when their combined support would have been enough to win the seat.

The other claim often made by advocates of the CV is that it promotes majority victors. On the evidence to date this claim is less defensible, especially where few voters mark their second and later preferences. The major weakness in the experience of the CV to date has been that most voters do not mark any ‘contingent’ preferences. Considering that the contingent vote (unlike the alternative vote) effectively requires voters to guess who the top two candidates in any election will be in order to use their preferences effectively, it is perhaps not surprising that the expression of ‘contingent’ preferences has always been optional. However, this has meant that the system has rarely worked as planned: in Queensland, for example, few voters expressed second or later preferences, and consequently nearly all seats returned results identical to a FPTP contest (although when the system did start to be used more effectively by voters — and against the government — it was promptly abandoned). As Table 7.3 shows, at 16 elections between 1896 and 1935 the contingent vote changed the final result in only seven seats, until the rise of the Protestant Labor Party in the late 1930s.

**Table 7.3: Effect of the Contingent Vote in Queensland 1896-1941**

<b>Election</b>	<b>No. of members elected</b>	<b>No. of districts where preferences were counted</b>	<b>No. of electoral districts where result was changed</b>
1896	72	11	0
1899	72	10	1
1902	72	8	1
1904	72	4	0
1907	72	16	1
1908	72	4	1
1909	72	5	0
1912	72	3	0
1915	72	7	1
1918	72	2	1
1920	72	5	1
1923	72	4	0
1926	72	3	0
1929	72	2	0
1932	62	6	0
1935	62	3	0
1938	62	20	3
1941	62	5	2

Source: Electoral and Administrative Review Commission 1990, 57.

Similar problems appear to bedevil the system in Sri Lanka, where only 2 percent of voters expressed preferences at the first presidential election in 1982, and where popular understanding of the system is low.<sup>21</sup> There the system does afford voters the opportunity to express some kind of choice *between* candidates on their ballot, and gives minority groups the chance to have some influence on which majority candidate is selected — neither of which is possible under FPTP. As noted in Chapter Five, this can provide a stake for minority groups in the system, who know that even if they do not have the numbers to elect their own candidate outright, they can certainly influence which majority candidate gets elected via their second or third ‘contingent’ preferences. Unfortunately, the experience of most cases to date has been that, unless voters are forced to express preferences, the contingent vote tends to degenerate into a straight FPTP contest, with all the attendant disadvantages of that system.

<sup>21</sup> See Commissioner of Elections 1983, 60.



As noted earlier, discussion of the CV is almost completely absent from the standard literature on electoral systems. None of the major comparative works on electoral systems of the past thirty years mentions the system.<sup>22</sup> On the rare occasions when a CV election is cited — usually by reference to Sri Lanka’s presidential elections — the system is often misclassified as AV. Horowitz, for example, provides two definitions of AV, one of which is actually a description of the CV (1991a, 188). A similar error is made in Shugart and Carey’s otherwise comprehensive volume on presidential systems, which compounds the error by comparing presidential elections in Ireland (where the specified electoral system is actually STV, which is identical to AV in single-member elections) with elections in Sri Lanka, which they assume to be an identical system (1992, 210fn). Even the *doyen* of the comparative study of electoral systems, Arend Lijphart, makes the error, mistakenly classifying Sri Lanka as an example of AV (1995a, 413). This could be dismissed as a semantic quibble of little importance, were it not for the fact that the two systems will often produce quite different results. If we take the example used earlier, but change the relative vote shares slightly, this is illustrated quite sharply (see Table 7.4). Under CV rules, the two independent candidates are eliminated and their votes passed on to Labor or Liberal, with the result that the Labor candidate is narrowly elected, with 5050 votes to the Liberal’s 4950. Under AV rules, by contrast, the independent labor candidate’s preferences go to the other independent, who now has 3100 votes — more than the Liberal’s total of 3000. The Liberal is thus the next to be eliminated; his preferences ensure the easy election of the independent liberal over the Labor candidate.

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<sup>22</sup> These include Rae 1967; Lakeman 1974; Taagepera and Shugart 1989; Lijphart and Grofman 1984; Lijphart 1984; Grofman and Lijphart 1986; Shugart and Carey 1992; and Lijphart 1994a.

**Table 7.4: A Hypothetical Example of the Contingent Vote (2)**

Candidate	First count	Second count	Result
Independent labor	600	CV and AV: Eliminated — all second preferences to Ind. Liberal. Third prefs to Labor.	
Independent liberal	2500	CV: Eliminated — 1950 second preferences to liberal; 550 to Labour. AV: $2500 + 600 = 3100$	<b>AV: Independent liberal elected</b> ( $2500 + 600 + 3000 = 6100$ )
Liberal	3000	CV: $3000 + 1950 = 4950$ AV: Eliminated 2 <sup>nd</sup> . All second prefs to independent liberal	
Labor	3900	CV: $3900 + 550 + 600 = 5050$ AV: $3900 + 0 = 3900$	<b>CV: Labor elected</b>
Total votes	10 000	10 000	
Majority needed to win	5 001	5 001	

The point of this example is that AV and CV are clearly distinct systems, and should not be confused or discussed as if CV was a mere variation of AV. In fact, in conditions of high candidature, it becomes more and more likely that the two systems will elect different candidates, because the votes of lower-placed candidates are more likely to see a candidate initially placed third or fourth (who would be eliminated under the CV) gain enough preferences under AV rules to leap-frog one of the two leaders during the distribution of preferences.

### **The pros and cons of preferential voting: theoretical perspectives**

We have examined the enthusiasm with which politicians and reformists in some countries have embraced preferential voting. What has been the situation with electoral theorists? Here preferential voting's support has been more equivocal: preferential voting can be shown to have a number of theoretical qualities that almost every theory of voting favours, but it can also be easily proved that preferential voting fails (in common with almost all other voting systems) some other relatively straightforward measures of fairness and rationality. On the pro side, the most obvious advantage of preferential voting is that it enables an individual voter's personal preferences to be both

expressed and aggregated. The cons are that preferential voting will often fail to pick a *Condorcet winner* and is not always *monotonic*. These terms will be defined below. First, however, this thesis will examine the theoretical claims made in favour of preferential voting.

*Preferential voting: the arguments in favour*

A fairly fundamental test of any electoral system is whether it enables a voter to formally express their personal rankings of parties and candidates on the ballot. As McLean has argued, most voters can normally rank at least some of the candidates for election against each other — and the more information a voting procedure can use, the better (1987, 154). This needs to be tempered somewhat: a voting system which *requires* electors to express preferences they may not in fact possess, such as a full preferential system, is susceptible to random effects such as the ‘donkey vote’ phenomenon observed for federal elections in Australia, in which some electors simply number sequentially from 1 onwards down the ballot paper. In most cases, a system in which electors rank only as many preferences as they actually possess is clearly superior to one that forces them to invent preferences. Of course, if all electors only expressed one preference, then the resultant contest would effectively become a first-past-the-post contest, which has some serious theoretical limitations of its own. Nonetheless, it is hard to find anyone interested in electoral systems who will oppose the rank-ordering of candidates: Lijphart argues that the facility for transferring and accumulating votes — possible only with some form of preferential ranking — are two innovations “that appear to work particularly well and that deserve to be recommended as models for electoral engineers elsewhere” (1994a, 145), while McLean claims that some facility for preference ordering is one of three basic requirements of a good voting system (1987, 154).

Of course, the actual manner in which transferability, accumulation and rank-ordering of preferences is achieved depends primarily on the way an electoral system permits the expression of preference information: what electoral theorists call ‘ballot structure’. Rae’s ground-breaking study of electoral systems, *The Political Consequences of Electoral Laws* (1967), was the first to introduce the concept of ballot structure, and the distinction between *categorical* and *ordinal* ballots. A ballot is categorical if it forces voters to say they prefer one party in parliament as opposed to all others — as exists in

FPTP systems, ‘closed’ list PR systems and those ‘open’ party lists which enable voters to choose between candidates but not between parties. An ordinal ballot comprises a ballot structure that allows a more complex expression of choice via a rank ordering of parties or candidates — such as is explicitly required under AV, CV and STV elections (Rae 1967, 17-18). Rae also defined as ordinal those systems that enable ‘cumulation’ (the ability to give more than one vote to the same candidate) or ‘panachage’ (the ability to vote for several candidates from different party lists), as exists in Switzerland and Luxembourg. The distinction between ordinal and categorical ballots exists on a different dimension to the standard typology of electoral systems, which seeks to classify different systems into examples of majoritarian formulae on the one hand and proportional representation formulae on the other.<sup>23</sup> Instead, ordinal ballots are found in both PR and non-PR systems. They are also a feature of the two-round runoff system, which effectively forces voters to make choices about their preferred candidates in two separate contests. By contrast, most versions of PR do not enable electors to vote for more than one party or to express the strength of their choice. All of the continental European democracies bar Fifth Republic France use some form of party list PR, for example, and most of these give the voter some choice as to the ordering of candidates within a party list.<sup>24</sup> But in all of these cases, bar the exceptions of Switzerland and Luxembourg noted above, voters can only choose between candidates *within* a chosen party list, not between candidates from rival parties. The defining feature of preferential voting, and the factor that makes preference swapping such an effective political tool — the ability to rank candidates from different parties — is not present.

While most political scientists would argue that the greater choice available under an ordinal ballot makes it unequivocally a good thing, there are also more subtle difficulties in forcing voters to make an ordinal choice when they register their vote. Most famous is the ‘voters’ paradox’: that for any three given voters (A, B, C) and options ( $p$ ,  $q$ ,  $r$ ) it is possible that A ranks the options  $pqr$ , B ranks the options  $qrp$  and C ranks the options  $rpq$ . On any choice,  $p$  beats  $q$ ,  $q$  beats  $r$  and  $r$  beats  $p$ . In such a case the options are said to ‘cycle’, meaning that there is no *Condorcet winner*. A Condorcet winner is any option that can beat all other options in a pairwise contest. In 1785, the Marquis de Condorcet first observed that in many voting systems, results were

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<sup>23</sup> See Lijphart 1984, 150-68.

<sup>24</sup> For a detailed discussion see Katz 1986, 85-103.

not necessarily fair if each option (or, in the case of an election, each candidate) could compete individually with each other candidate. If there are only two options, one of them must always be a Condorcet winner; but if there are more than two, then it is possible that none of them are, meaning that there is not always an overall (Condorcet) winner. A good illustration of this paradox is the following example based on British parliamentary elections in which three candidates from the Conservative (C), Labour (L) and Liberal-Democrat (D) parties are competing for election. A hypothetical but plausible preference ordering of voters might be as follows:

**Table 7.5: A Hypothetical Preference Ordering for British Parliamentary Elections**

Conservative voters (45%)	Labour voters (35%)	Liberal-Democrat voters (20%)
C	L	D
D	D	L
L	C	C

In a pairwise contest, it can be seen that 45 percent of voters prefer C to L; 35 percent prefer L to D; and 55 percent prefer D to C (the other combinations are the obverse of these, i.e. 55 percent prefer L to C; 65 percent prefer D to L; and 45 percent prefer C to D). The Condorcet winner is clearly D, who can beat both L and C in a pairwise contest (by 65 percent and 55 percent respectively). However, if this was a real British election held under FPTP then candidate C would have won the seat and candidate D would have come last. This example perhaps helps to explain the enthusiasm of British electoral reformers in general and those associated with the Liberal Democrats in particular in ensuring that any electoral system will pick the Condorcet victor. McLean, for example, argues that any good voting system should pick a Condorcet winner if it exists (1987, 154). The problem is that all preferential systems clearly fail this condition. If we examine again the results from the seat of Richmond at the 1990 election (Table 6.1), it is clear that candidate Blunt of the National Party is, *on first preferences*, the most popular candidate. His first-preference vote (28,257) is clearly superior to his two main rivals, candidates Newell (18,423) and Caldicott (16,072), and to all other candidates. However, as the distribution of preferences show, it is equally clear that Blunt was the least-favoured candidate of a majority of all voters: more people wanted someone other than Blunt to win the seat than wanted Blunt himself to

win. As we are not privy to the preference orderings of those who voted for the non-eliminated candidates (Blunt and Newell), it is impossible to know whether there was a Condorcet winner; it may be that there wasn't one. Assuming that Downs' median voter theorem applies, and that issues are unidimensional, there should always be a Condorcet winner.<sup>25</sup> Where issues are multi-dimensional — that is, are not capable of being placed on a linear continuum, such as left-right — then all bets are off: there are no guarantees that a Condorcet winner exists.

When a Condorcet winner does exist, preferential voting systems will sometimes fail to pick the Condorcet winner, but they can never pick the Condorcet *loser* — that is, least-favoured option. By contrast, any system which does not take account of a complete ordering of preferences (such as FPTP), and even sometimes those that do, are open to the possibility of the Condorcet loser being chosen. This paradox is at the centre of the burgeoning field of social choice theory, which seeks to examine the relationship between individual preferences and social choices in a range of fields far beyond elections. For the purposes of this thesis, however, its significance lies in the nature of 'strategic voting'. Under a categorical ballot, a voter is often faced with a dilemma: is it better to support the most favoured candidate even though that candidate is unlikely to win, or to support a less preferred but more widely popular candidate who may have a better chance of victory? The dilemma of 'strategic voting' — voting for a candidate who is not one's first choice — is one of the most basic problems with all ordinal ballot voting systems, particularly those that use a FPTP formula. One of the great advantages of preferential voting systems is that they are effectively immune to the effects of strategic voting — partly because the requirement to rank candidates makes strategic voting largely unnecessary<sup>26</sup>, and partly because the information requirements to successfully effect strategic voting under preferential voting are so onerous.<sup>27</sup> Lijphart has found a "virtual absence of strategic voting" (1994a, 98) in Australia, and there is no evidence that strategic voting of the type that regularly occurs at British elections ever having been a factor under any preferential voting system anywhere. Nonetheless,

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<sup>25</sup> See Downs 1957, chap. 8.

<sup>26</sup> See Lijphart 1994a, 189fn.

<sup>27</sup> See Bartholdi and Orlin 1991, 341-54.

under certain theoretical scenarios, all non-dictatorial voting systems can be subject to manipulation and strategic voting, and preferential systems are no exception.<sup>28</sup>

*Preferential voting: the arguments against*

If the two major theoretical advantages of preferential voting are that it enables both the expression and aggregation of voters preferences amongst candidates, and that it is not (except in extremely unlikely circumstances) susceptible to strategic voting, what then are the theoretical *disadvantages* of preferential voting? One disadvantage has already been identified: *compulsory* preferential systems, such as exist in Australia, compel voters to express preferences which they may not in fact possess, while *optional* preferential systems are susceptible to become straight FPTP contests if nobody expresses more than a first preference. These are potentially serious problems, but relatively minor when compared to the more fundamental theoretical objection that preferential voting is not always *monotonic*. A voting system is monotonic if gaining more votes can never hurt a candidate. While it is true that simply gaining more first preference votes will not harm a candidate's chances under preferential voting, it does not follow that a change in the number of first preferences taken from one candidate and given to another will always help the beneficiary of those votes. It is easily proven that, as a result of altering the sequence in which lower-placed candidates are eliminated, gaining more first preference votes can see a candidate lose an election he would have otherwise won. The following example is taken from Brams and Fishburn's analysis of the vagaries of STV, but it applies equally to other forms of preferential voting such as the alternative vote or the contingent vote:

Assume there are four classes of voters, with the indicated numbers of voters in each class ranking four candidates (*a,b,c,d*) as follows:

I.	7: <i>abcd</i>
II.	6: <i>bacd</i>
III.	5: <i>cbad</i>
IV.	3: <i>dcba</i>

Since no candidate has a majority (i.e. 11 votes out of the total number of 21), the lowest scoring candidate, *d*, with 3 votes, is eliminated and his second preferences passed on to candidate *c*, giving *c* 8 votes. Because none of the remaining candidates still has a majority, the (new) lowest placed candidate, *b*, is eliminated next, and his six second preferences go to candidate *a*, who is elected with 13 votes.

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<sup>28</sup> This is the essence of the Gibbard-Satterthwaite theorem on the manipulability of electoral systems (see Gibbard 1973; Satterthwaite 1975). For a discussion of strategic voting applied to preferential systems, see Dummett 1984, 210-30.

Now examine the situation where the three class IV voters raised candidate *a* from fourth to first in their rankings, so that their new ordering would be *adcb*. Now *a* has ten votes (one short of a majority), *b* has six votes and *c* has five votes. As the new lowest placed candidate, *c* is eliminated and his five second preferences passed on to *b*, who is elected with an absolute majority of 11 votes (Brams and Fishburn 1984, 150-51).

This remarkable result is illustrative of one of the fundamental paradoxes of all voting systems: they are all open to manipulation in some manner, and almost all can be proven to fail relatively undemanding tests of fairness and rationality. The explanation for the apparently capricious scenario outlined above is in the sequence by which preferential voting systems eliminate lower-ranked candidates if no-one has an absolute majority of first preferences. When the candidate with the lowest number of first preference votes is eliminated, his or her second and later preferences are then allocated to the continuing candidates as required. However, this allocation of preferences is essentially *arbitrary*: the later preferences of voters who chose a relatively unpopular candidate are counted before the later preferences of those who chose a relatively popular candidate (who will still be in the running). There is no logical reason for privileging one preference ordering over any other, but this is precisely what happens under preferential voting. Indeed, in many cases the later preferences of the leading candidate(s) will not be counted at all. In enabling all voters to express their preference orderings, AV inadvertently makes some preference orderings count more than others.

The question of monotonicity may seem theoretical and remote from the real world: it isn't. The lack of monotonicity was crucial to the Plant Commission's rejection of STV (and, by implication, AV) as desirable electoral systems for Britain in 1992.<sup>29</sup> The Plant Commission, influenced by Oxford professor of logic Michael Dummett, was apparently sufficiently concerned at the theoretical possibilities of extra preference votes harming an individual candidate as to reject STV as a viable electoral system for Britain — although curiously its favoured system, the supplementary vote, has this same weakness. A more likely explanation for the Labour Party's unexpected interest in the theory of voting paradoxes was that the stated concerns about monotonicity were in fact a convenient justification for ruling out a PR system which would not necessarily have assisted the party's electoral prospects. As one Labour campaigner explained:

Dummett's criticism concerning the lack of monotonicity ... was the excuse Labour was looking for because, with the press we have and the internal variety which goes to make up the Labour

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<sup>29</sup> See Plant Commission 1992, Appendix 1.



coalition, there was no way that Labour would, on its own, embrace a system where its candidates fight each other (Georghiou 1993, 82).

Nonetheless, the question of monotonicity has introduced a significant theoretical argument against the use of any preferential electoral system into the ongoing debate on electoral reform in the UK. While the non-monotonicity of preferential voting is a serious theoretical flaw, it would appear that the likelihood of Brams and Fishburn's scenario taking place in a real-world contest is remote.<sup>30</sup> The Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland, which uses STV, has found no evidence in 22 years for a non-monotonic election result (Bradley 1995, 46-47), while one estimate has put the likely incidence of a non-monotonic election result under STV in the United Kingdom at less than one case every century (Allard 1995, 46-47).

## Conclusion

The message of this chapter is a simple one: all preferential systems are not equal, and apparently minor technical differences between the various electoral systems can have major consequences in terms of outcomes. In addition, a number of systems which have been advocated as being particularly good choices for ethnically-divided societies are found, upon closer examination, to have a range of undesirable consequences. Examination of the practical experience of multi-member AV, for example, suggests that it suffers from some major technical flaws which may lead to extremely disproportional election results, making it unsuitable for political elections in general and particularly unsuitable system for multiethnic societies, where it could quite likely lead to the complete exclusion of even large minorities from representation. Similarly, analysis of the effects of the single transferable vote (STV) at elections in the ethnically-divided states of Estonia and Northern Ireland raise doubts as to the efficacy of STV in promoting inter-ethnic accommodation, particularly in cases of bi-polar ethnic divisions. Examination of the historical experience of the CV also suggests that it has been considerably less effective at ensuring preference-swapping than AV; and the 'optional preferential' version of AV is itself less effective in this regard than 'full preferential' AV which makes marking of all preferences on the ballot compulsory.

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<sup>30</sup> See Dummett 1984, 222.

While this thesis has served in part to validate and supply empirical evidence for a theory of multi-ethnic democracy first advanced by Donald Horowitz, the specific institutional prescriptions that constitutional engineers should consider as a result of the evidence presented herein thus differ substantially from those advanced by Horowitz himself. In most of his writings to date, for example, Horowitz has concentrated on the Sri Lankan contingent vote system when discussing the accommodative potential of preferential voting. As the above discussion of the relative properties of the alternative vote and the contingent vote make clear, however, on most comparative indicators AV is a superior system. Because its counting rules ensure the progressive elimination of lower-placed candidates one-by-one rather than simultaneously eliminating all but the top two, AV offers much greater potential minority involvement in an election than CV. Under AV, any candidate bar the lowest-placed has a chance to win the seat; under CV only the two top-placed candidates have this opportunity. CV also requires electors to guess who the two leading candidates will be in order to utilise their vote effectively — a situation which provides an incentive for strategic voting, which most electoral system scholars would regard as a marked disadvantage.

Moreover, the evidence from the use of CV in Sri Lanka and STV in Northern Ireland suggests that optional rather than compulsory preference marking is a definite weakness in divided societies. In both of these cases, only a small minority of voters expressed any preferences after the first. Similar results have been found in other optional preferential voting systems: at STV elections in Malta only one percent of votes for major party candidates are transferred across party lines (Hirczy and Lane 1997, 23), while at Estonia's 1990 STV election ethnicity overrode other concerns in ranking of candidates, with most voters restricting preference transfers to members of their own ethnic group (Taagepera 1996, 31). This confirms Laponce's theoretical speculation that with optional preference marking, voters in divided societies are more likely to fail to indicate any secondary choices than to give their preference vote to members of another community:

it is very doubtful that the different choices of an elector will go from the candidates of one community to that of another. If the elector runs short of candidates he likes within his own community he will usually, rather than give a second, third or fourth choice to a candidate of a community other than his own, fail to indicate such subsidiary choices (Laponce 1957, 327).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Of course, a system where preference marking of all candidates is a requirement for a valid ballot, as in Australia, does not suffer from this drawback.

This is also a potential disadvantage of an optional preferential version of AV: in a comparison of optional and compulsory preferential AV forms, Punnett found that

the optional use of preferences does undermine at least two of the supposed merits of the Alternative Vote: the efficient mutual delivery of second preferences between allied parties, and the election of 'legitimate' MPs who can claim to have the support of an overall majority of electors (1987, 43).

The experience of PNG's optional preferential AV elections, however, suggests that, where incentives are strong and/or communities are less divided, voters will sometimes be prepared to give their lower-order votes to members of other ascriptive groups. Nonetheless, making preference marking compulsory to some degree, as recommended by the Fijian CRC, clearly increases the chances of inter-community vote transfers taking place (CRC 1996, 319-320).

A further significant distinction between the evidence of this thesis and Horowitz's proposals is the distinction between single- and multi-member AV. As the account of the experience of multi-member AV in the Australian Senate has made clear, the extreme disproportionality and unpredictability of multi-member AV makes it an inappropriate system for any society, not just a divided one.<sup>32</sup> But when looking at South Africa, Horowitz suggested that there "may need to be multimember constituencies" used with AV in order for electoral districts to be sufficiently ethnically-heterogeneous (1991a, 195). This suggestion represented a serious flaw in his overall prescription, and the one which attracted the most criticism from electoral systems scholars, and it is notable that most critiques of his proposal focused on the unworkability of multi-member AV as one of their major criticisms.<sup>33</sup> It also served to some extent to overshadow the considerable merit in his basic proposal for AV, and may well have retarded more serious investigation of the benefits of single-member AV. Horowitz revived a similar proposal when discussing electoral options for Fiji, arguing that if it was not possible to ensure sufficient ethnic heterogeneity under AV in single-member districts,

then it would be possible to draw boundaries for larger constituencies, in which two or three separately-elected seats would be located. These would not be multi-member seats; two or three members would have to be elected by the same electorate to fulfil the requirement of constituency

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<sup>32</sup> The exception to this is the system of multi-member AV used in Nauru, where preferences are counted as fractional votes — a second preference being worth half a vote, a third preferences worth a third of a vote, and so on — which appears to work quite well there.

<sup>33</sup> See Lijphart 1991a; Reynolds 1995; Lijphart 1997.

scale for heterogeneity, but candidates competing for one seat would compete only with candidates competing for that same seat, and preferences would be transferred only within single seats (Horowitz 1997, 31).

Unfortunately, this proposal would have mirrored, in practice, the way multi-member AV worked in Australia — because each vacancy is effectively filled by a different election, stable party identification in the electorate could easily see every seat won by the same party. It would also be likely to create serious headaches in terms of party nomination strategies, and was not adopted in Fiji.

In sum, and contrary to much of the existing literature, a comparison of the relative performance of the various preferential electoral systems suggests that single-member AV with compulsory marking of preferences is likely to be the most powerful electoral system for encouraging centripetal outcomes. However, such a system will only work to encourage vote-pooling and centripetal outcomes in divided societies where there is sufficient ethnic heterogeneity at the electorate level and sufficient proliferation of parties and candidates for preference-swapping deals to be a rational strategy for electoral success. The centripetal approach also assumes that there is the political space, even in divided societies, for political appeals made on issues other than ethnic identity to succeed — which presumes that there are a sufficient number of ‘floating’ voters prepared to cast their vote on the basis of an issue other than ethnicity. If there is no room for appeals to other interests, and no cross-cutting cleavages evident in the political spectrum, then the prospects for constitutional engineering prescriptions to encourage such interests to emerge is limited. The core appeal of centripetalism is its ability to promote and give voice to the underlying moderate sentiments of the electorate in a sustainable manner, but it cannot promote moderate sentiments that do not, in fact, exist.

Because of our identification of single-member AV as the most promising centripetal electoral system, the question of what socio-structural conditions facilitate the use of single-member AV methods is therefore crucial to any accurate assessment of the utility of centripetalism as a legitimate strategy for promoting democracy in divided societies. Because of the rejection of multi-member AV as an acceptable electoral system, and question marks about the strengths of the incentives for moderation provided by STV, any workable system of single-member AV for parliamentary elections will have to utilise relatively small, contiguous electoral districts. But centripetal methods can only

work to encourage inter-ethnic accommodation when constituency boundaries can be drawn in such a way as to create ethnically-heterogeneous districts. This focuses attention on the different types of ethnic group distribution in different ethnically-divided states. In PNG, for example, there are *so many* ethnic groups, numbering in the thousands, that even relatively small single-member districts tend to include, in most cases, a number of different ethnic groups all competing for election. Thus the key facilitating conditions for centripetal electoral methods to succeed — ethnic heterogeneity and a corresponding multiplicity of candidates — are both present. This is a situation common to other territories with similar social structures to PNG — other states in Melanesia, for example — but appears to be relatively unusual elsewhere. The final chapter of this thesis will therefore look at how widespread the applicability of the centripetal model of constitutional engineering may be to other ethnically-divided societies around the world.

## Chapter Eight: Conclusion

Divided societies, like Tolstoy's unhappy families, tend to be divided in different ways. This may seem a simple or even simplistic statement, but it is surprising how many 'one size fits all' conflict-management packages have been recommended for divided societies without sufficient understanding of the structure of the society itself. Ethnically-divided societies can be 'fragmented' into many contending groups (such as PNG) or 'balanced' between a few similarly-sized configurations, which can then be broken down into 'bipolar' (e.g. Fiji, Cyprus) or 'multipolar' (e.g. Bosnia) structures. They can feature 'dominant majorities' (e.g. Sri Lanka) or 'dominant minorities' (e.g. Rwanda).<sup>1</sup> Minorities can be based on indigenous or other 'homeland' societies, or on settler diasporas.<sup>2</sup> Ethnic groups can be divided by international boundaries between several states or entirely encapsulated by them.<sup>3</sup> Groups can be territorially concentrated or widely dispersed. The nature of the ethnic divide can have a significant influence on the way ethnic conflicts are manifested, and consequently on the possible strategies for dealing with them. This is particularly the case when we examine the prescriptions of the dominant model of democracy in divided societies, consociationalism, and alternatives based on centripetal methods. This chapter will argue that, although proponents of both approaches have typically paid insufficient attention to the significance of ethnic group structure in different types of divided societies, both are highly dependent upon questions of group demographics.

### Centripetalism versus consociationalism

Consociational prescriptions for ethnically-divided societies are based on a model in which each ethnic polity enjoys a degree of local autonomy and veto powers over matters directly affecting its welfare, while being guaranteed proportional representation in parliament, the executive and the civil service of its own members. Arend Lijphart, the most prominent supporter of consociational measures, has claimed that consociational democracy is "the *only* workable type of democracy in deeply divided societies" and that centripetal prescriptions are "deeply flawed and dangerous" (1994b,

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<sup>1</sup> See Sisk 1996, 15-16.

<sup>2</sup> See Esman 1994, 6-9.

<sup>3</sup> See May 1996a, 9.

222, 224). This is not the place for a detailed analysis of the arguments for and against consociationalism, which have generated a small mountain of literature, much of which is well outside the boundaries of this thesis.<sup>4</sup> But it is clear that a number of the central tenets of consociational theory are simply inapplicable to traditional societies like PNG. Most consociational prescriptions, for example, presuppose the existence of functional political organisations headed by social elites which represent the component ethnic groups. Under conditions such as those applying in PNG, where civil society is weak and where most ascriptive ethnic identities exist at the local clan, tribe and village level, such organisations are often simply not present. Similarly, the consociationalist reliance on elites as the driving force for inter-ethnic moderation appears to be questionable in PNG, especially considering the incidence of violence at the local level and the role of elite instigators in virtually all the micro-nationalist and secessionist ethnic movements in PNG to date.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, the centripetal approach relies on *popular* rather than elite activity as the driving force for moderation: inter-ethnic moderation is dependent on the behaviour of campaigning politicians and their supporters ‘on the ground’. Moreover, unlike consociational prescriptions which rely on *constraints* (such as minority vetoes) against hostility, the centripetal approach produces *incentives* for accommodative behaviour — via the search for secondary support. The Fijian case provides another area of contrast: centripetalism is hostile to the type of communal-roll based electoral system used for many years in Fiji, as such a system requires a formal identification of ethnicity, and can thus contribute to the consolidation of ethnic politics rather than its breakdown. By contrast, as long as communal seats are distributed proportionately, as in pre-coup Fiji, communal rolls and other devices which explicitly recognise ethnic identity are entirely consistent with consociational approaches (Lijphart 1985b, 25fn). This further distinguishes the centripetal model from consociationalism.

The arguments for the specific electoral recommendations of consociationalism, in the form of proportional representation electoral laws, are also worth briefly considering in the PNG context. Lijphart has said that “the electoral system that is optimal for segmented societies is list PR in large districts” (1990, 13). His arguments are based on the tendency of PR to produce multi-party systems and parliaments, so that all segments of the population can be represented in parliament, and the empirical relationship

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<sup>4</sup> See Lijphart 1985a, 83-117 for a summary of these.

<sup>5</sup> See May 1982, 424-28.

between PR and ‘oversized’ or ‘grand’ coalitions, which is the fundamental tenet of the ‘power-sharing’ approach on which consociationalism is based. Lijphart favours list PR in large districts because that is the system which has been shown to maximise proportionality of election results, and because it is a relatively simple system for both voters and electoral officials (1990, 11). PR election rules are thus important of themselves — because they are likely to facilitate parliamentary representation of all groups — and also an important component of wider consociational prescriptions which emphasise the need for grand coalitions, group autonomy and minority veto powers.

The evidence from PNG, however, suggests that such prescriptions can be rendered meaningless in extremely heterogeneous societies which evidence high levels of *multiplicity* and *fragmentation* of ethnic groups. In PNG, for example, the granting of proportional representation to all ‘minority’ ethnic groups is simply not feasible. The legislature itself would have to be eight times larger just to represent all languages spoken — a ‘Parliament of a Thousand Tribes’, to quote the title of one work on pre-independence PNG (White 1972). Likewise, proportional representation of political parties in the legislature according to their share of the popular vote is meaningless because there is no real party system of which to speak. Parties tend not to be organised around ideologies or even policies, but rather around dominant personalities. There appears to be little party identification on the part of the electorate. Members frequently change their party allegiance after they have been elected in the hope of being able to secure a ministry or to take advantage of some other aspect of government patronage.

A list PR electoral system would thus be virtually impossible to operate in PNG, as it would force voters to choose between parties rather than between candidates. At the 1997 elections, the major ‘party’ was in fact independent candidates, who gained 61 percent of the total vote and 36 seats. By contrast, the most successful self-declared party, the People’s Progress Party, could gain only six percent of the total vote (although it did win 16 seats in parliament). One result of PNG’s weak party system is that governments are, by necessity, coalitions of several parties and independents. This has important implications for the argument over electoral systems in divided societies: one of the reasons consociationalists favour proportional electoral rules is because of their association with multipartism and hence with multi-party coalitions — Lewis, for example, argues that “one of the advantages of proportional representation is that it



tends to promote coalition government” (1965, 79). Like Horowitz, Lijphart sees the formation of inclusive multiethnic coalition governments as a crucial factor for sustainable democracy in divided societies (1991d, 505). In PNG, by contrast, governments have *always* been loose coalitions of various parties and groups regardless of the electoral formula in use. There is no need to ‘engineer’ coalition government in PNG — the fragmentation of the society and weak party system mean that coalitions are almost inevitable.

Given this situation, the centripetal approach would appear to be the only feasible mechanism for accommodating ethnic divisions and reducing ethnic conflict in PNG and other highly fragmented societies. By providing sufficient incentives for groups to co-operate and compromise before the election, and by providing an electoral system which rewards those candidates who reach beyond their own group for second and later preferences, centripetalism allows conflicts to be managed at the popular rather than the elite level, before the election rather than after. Centripetalism posits the electorate, not elites, as the engine of moderation in divided societies, and is thus particularly suitable for societies in which the focus of political competition is at the local rather than national level. Sisk has argued that because centripetalism encourages political leaders to appeal to the moderate forces in an electorate in order to maximise their electoral prospects, it also promotes “the kind of compromises they must make at the centre if the divided society is to be truly democratic and stable” (1995, 36).

In PNG and other highly fragmented societies, centripetalism may well be the only way to manage ethnic conflict which enables *all* groups to have a stake in the success of the process. Because there are many more groups than can be represented in the legislature, a process whereby those groups are given sufficient incentives to behave accommodatively towards one another *before* an election is vastly preferable to expecting the representative of one particular ethnic interest to behave accommodatively *after* the election. Because candidates in many cases have no possibility of winning a clear majority from their own supporter base alone, they have no choice but to seek the support of others. This support does not necessarily have to be a by-product of accommodatory behaviour: indeed, it may be that more extreme positions will win greater secondary support than less extreme ones. The available evidence, however, points in the other direction. In PNG, groups previously engaging in ‘tribal warfare’

were coerced to the equivalent of the negotiating table by the overriding need to achieve majority support, whilst in Australia there is a strong scholarly consensus that AV encourages centrist politics and rewards the middle ground.

However, just as the applicability of consociationalism appears to be dependent upon questions of social structure, so the centripetal approach is likely to work well only under certain conditions. The most important precondition of all is that electoral constituencies are ethnically heterogeneous. The more ethnically-fragmented a constituency, the more likely it is that meaningful vote pooling will take place. In many ethnically-divided countries, however, members of the same ethnic group tend to cluster together, which means that the relatively small, single-member districts which are a feature of AV would in most cases result in constituencies which are ethnically homogeneous rather than heterogeneous. By contrast, societies where ethnic groups are extremely fragmented and/or dispersed are likely to result in electorates which are sufficiently heterogeneous for vote-pooling to take place under AV. In instances of extreme ethnic fractionalization, vote-pooling becomes a virtual necessity: in these cases, where it is extremely unlikely that there will be an outright majority victor, second and later preferences will almost always be counted to determine the winner. In these cases there is thus an in-built incentive for candidates to seek the second and later preferences of other groups to give them a chance of victory.

This condition for meaningful vote pooling again illustrates the contextual difference between the consociational and centripetal approaches. According to Lijphart, the optimal number of segments for a consociationalist approach to work is three or four, and conditions become progressively less favourable as more segments are added (1977, 56). For the centripetal approach to succeed, the situation is reversed: three segments would be the *minimum* number of groups necessary for vote-pooling to work, and conditions for success increase as the number of segments increase. This has clear implications for future discussions of institutional design for ethnically divided societies: if some models of conflict-regulating measures work well in one setting but poorly in others, as the above analysis suggests, then it is clear that more attention needs to be paid to the context and demographics of a particular case when suggesting institutional prescriptions for conflict management.

## The significance of group demographics

Under conditions of ethnic 'census' voting patterns, where electors overwhelmingly cast their vote for their ascriptive candidate or party, the territorial distribution of ethnic groups is all-important for recommendations about electoral system designs. Vote pooling formulae will only provide incentives for inter-ethnic accommodation if electoral districts are sufficiently heterogeneous for preference-swapping to be an attractive political strategy. Outside of the highly fragmented ethnic structure typified by PNG, the best conditions for this is if the members of different ethnic groups are widely dispersed and inter-mingled throughout a country. The worst conditions are where groups are geographically concentrated or segregated into particular areas. Under such conditions, any single-member electoral districts are likely to be ethnically homogenous rather than heterogeneous, meaning that there is little possibility of inter-ethnic preference swapping occurring.

For consociational models based on list-PR formulae to function, by contrast, large regional or national electoral districts are usually necessary in order for a full spectrum of minority representation is to be achieved in a proportional manner. This means that approaches based on members representing particular geographical areas, and servicing the needs of a particular constituency, are inimical to the consociational approach. List PR systems are thus more likely to work well in conditions where a few large, territorially-defined ethnic groups can be represented, in close proportion to their actual numbers, in a national parliament. When combined with other conflict-mitigating arrangements, such as federalism and grand coalition governments, ethnic accommodations can be negotiated between elites, and ethnic conflict can be minimised by accentuating the territorial distinctions between groups.

Moreover, a social structure comprising a few large ethnic groups concentrated in particular regions is likely to be *unconducive* to the application of centripetal approaches. Where one group has an absolute majority in an electorate and is represented by only one party, there is little incentive for it to engage in preference-swapping arrangements with other groups, and little likelihood of minorities being taken into account at election time. This perhaps goes some way to explaining Lijphart's hostility to the AV proposal for South Africa, where there are indeed several large ethnic groups of roughly similar sizes which tend to be geographically concentrated in

particular areas.<sup>6</sup> By contrast, in PNG there is, as we have seen, an average of 21.8 candidates per seat, each usually backed by his or her own clan grouping. The fractionalized nature of clan groupings has meant that in most seats no ethnic group forms anything close to a majority.

A major reason for the success of AV in PNG was thus the highly fractionalized nature of PNG's multi-ethnic society which, when combined with relatively small, single-member electorates, provided the necessary level of candidate multiplication for centripetalism to succeed. Moreover, the evidence from PNG's three AV elections clearly points to accommodative campaign practices being encouraged by the preferential electoral system. Although there are still fewer examples than would be ideal, there is now some evidence that the centripetal approach can work and has worked to encourage accommodation within a divided society. This raises the question of precisely how representative PNG is when discussing the wider locus of ethnically-divided societies. How useful is the PNG case as a comparative model when discussing institutional remedies for managing ethnic conflict? And how representative is the extremely high degree of ethnic fractionalization which exists there of the wider locus of ethnic division and conflict around the world?

The answer would appear to be that instances of extremely fragmented multiethnic societies are, while more widely dispersed than many observers may realise, still a relatively small sub-section of the global scope of ethnically-divided states. The social structures of PNG, for example, are a basic component of Melanesian societies, and are thus replicated to greater or lesser degrees throughout much of the south-west Pacific. Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands both exhibit similar social structures to PNG. The Solomon Islands is very similar — predominantly Melanesian, with small minorities of Polynesian (6.6 percent) and i-Kiribati (1.5 percent) immigrants, but home to over 80 Melanesian languages as well as Polynesian, Pidgin and English. Vanuatu has approximately 105 different language groups, and is also divided along an overarching anglophone-francophone language division, a legacy of its status as a joint Anglo-French condominium until independence in 1980. These Melanesian states therefore

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<sup>6</sup> See Scarritt 1993.

exhibit the basic ethnic structure which makes vote pooling a theoretically attractive proposition.<sup>7</sup>

By contrast, the social structure of the fourth Melanesian state, the Republic of Fiji, is quite different: there the primary ethnic cleavage runs along a bi-polar division between Indian and indigenous Fijians. Both groups are, however, internally divided: the mostly Hindu Indian community has a sizeable (15 percent) Muslim minority and a number of sub-identities, often based on family roots in India, while the indigenous Fijian population combines elements of the basic Melanesian social structure with the Polynesian distinction between chiefs and commoners, all of which serve to significantly fragment the indigenous population. As noted earlier, the 1997 Fijian Constitution adopts a centripetal approach to ethnic conflict management via AV electoral laws. The ultimate success or failure of centripetalism in Fiji, however, will be heavily dependent on the demographic distribution of ethnic groups and the way in which electoral boundaries are drawn. There is a significant degree of territorial segregation of ethnic groups in rural Fiji, and the outer Fijian islands are almost entirely indigenous Fijian, so vote pooling there will have to take place on issues other than ethnicity, if it takes place at all. The situation on the main islands and in urban centres is more mixed. Some commentators have argued that, even in urban areas, “ethnic residential self-selectivity” occurs, rendering districts predominantly Indian or Fijian (Premdas 1995, 12). However, the smallness of the islands and the highly inter-mixed nature of many urban areas mean that electoral boundaries can be drawn in such a way as to create ethnically-heterogeneous electoral districts — that is, districts which have a reasonable mixture of both indigenous Fijian and Indian populations. If the makeup of these electorates is sufficiently diverse to enable genuine trading of preferences between groups, then the new system could well promote meaningful accommodation across

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<sup>7</sup> Moreover, three much larger countries also lay claim to other parts of Melanesia. The Torres Strait Islands between PNG and Queensland are territorially part of Australia. The western half of the island of New Guinea, Irian Jaya, which has much the same social structure as PNG, is territorially part of Indonesia, the world’s fourth most-populous country. Irian Jaya was forcibly incorporated into Indonesia in 1969 under a so-called ‘act of free choice’ by local leaders, and the indigenous Melanesian population has now been joined by some 150,000 Indonesian settlers on government-sponsored ‘transmigration’ schemes. The island of New Caledonia is technically part of metropolitan France, and elects representatives to the French parliament. Its population is split roughly equally between immigrant *caldoche* (French settler) and indigenous Melanesian populations. In both Irian Jaya and New Caledonia there are local independence movements, although these continue to be vigorously repressed in Irian Jaya in particular. But they do illustrate that the type of extremely fragmented structure of ethnic groups typical of Melanesia is considerably more widespread, in terms of states, than the geographical boundaries of the island region would initially suggest.

cleavages, “the object being to force political parties to appeal for votes for their candidates from communities other than the one in which they are based” (Lal 1997, 79). The Constitution Review Commission considered this question at some length and concluded that it is “entirely possible to draw constituency boundaries in Fiji in a way that achieves reasonable heterogeneity” (1996, 314-15). In other words, even with an ethnic structure very different from that of other Melanesian states — a bipolar division rather than a highly-fragmented one — the crucial factor of ethnically-diverse electoral districts (a precondition for inter-ethnic vote-pooling) can still be achieved.

For the centripetal approach to work, it would thus appear that ethnically-heterogeneous constituencies are a virtual necessity. Ethnically-heterogeneous constituencies assume one of two situations: a considerable *multiplicity* of ethnic groups, so that even relatively small single-member districts will include several ethnic groups; or a small number of ethnic groups but a high degree of group *dispersion* and *geographic inter-mixing*. As we have seen, the South Pacific region provides good examples of both types of structure: the case of PNG is the best illustration of group multiplicity, while the case of Fiji is a clear example of group dispersion. If either of these factors is present, then it should be possible to draw electoral boundaries in such a way as to create ethnically-heterogeneous districts, and thus to facilitate meaningful vote pooling. In either case, the presence of a number of roughly equivalent-sized ethnic groups in most constituencies virtually ensures that no group will have anything like enough support to win an outright majority. If a majority threshold is in place, successful candidates *must* receive secondary support from outside their own group.

An additional, although less important, favourable condition for vote-pooling is a situation in which the major ethnic groups are themselves sufficiently internally fragmented — either by divided responses towards ethnic issues (e.g. conciliatory versus non-conciliatory positions) or by non-ethnic cleavages (e.g. class) — for incentives to vote pooling still to occur. This is actually the rule rather than the exception in most ethnically-divided cases: it is rare for a single ideology or leader to represent an entire ethnic group.<sup>8</sup> As discussed in Chapter Five, in Sri Lanka, where the overwhelming majority of the population is Sinhalese, there is some evidence from presidential elections that the dominant parties will seek the preference support of the

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<sup>8</sup> See Horowitz 1985, 574.

minority (13%) Tamil population in order to surpass the majority threshold. Similarly in Fiji, the indigenous and Indian Fijian communities are themselves politically divided between several parties on both sides, which makes meaningful vote pooling more likely than if the two groups were united behind two dominant ethnic parties.

Prescriptions for electoral engineering are thus heavily dependent on questions of social structure and, in particular, group demography. Clearly, we need to look more carefully at the *type* of ethnic division within a particular country or region. An analysis of the different conditions prevalent in southern Africa and the South Pacific makes clear how much the structure of ethnic conflict can vary from region to region. In many regions of southern Africa, there tend to be a few large ethnic groups, most of which are territorially-concentrated in particular regions, meaning that there is little if any prospect for the creation of ethnically heterogeneous electorates. A recent survey found that:

African minorities are more highly concentrated in single contiguous geographical areas than are minorities in other regions. More than 70 percent of black Africans minorities were coded as concentrated in one region in comparison to ... 48 percent in the rest of the world. Concentration ... guarantees that many electoral constituencies and informal local power bases will be controlled by a single ethnopolitical group (Scarritt 1993, 256-57).

This situation holds true for most of the multi-ethnic states of sub-Saharan Africa. It is therefore likely that only the most highly ethnically fragmented states in this region — Tanzania, Zambia, Zaire — would be appropriate candidates for vote-pooling techniques, and even then much would depend upon the degree of politicization of this ethnic fractionalization. In the South Pacific, by contrast, ethnic groups are either so numerous, or so highly intermixed, that even small single-member electorates are typically ethnically heterogeneous, and thus likely to promote accommodative outcomes if integrative institutions are used. On such prosaic details rest much weightier prescriptions for the success or failure of consociational and centripetal approaches to the management of ethnic conflict.

### **Facilitating conditions for centripetalism**

As the above discussion indicates, there are two distinct sets of facilitating socio-structural conditions which favour the use of centripetalism as a mechanism for encouraging inter-ethnic accommodation in a divided society, namely:

- (a) an extremely high number of ethnic groups (e.g. Papua New Guinea), or

(b) a low number of ethnic groups, but a high degree of ethnic group dispersion and geographical inter-mixing (e.g. Fiji).

There are two broad categories of countries which satisfy one or other of these criteria. The first case represents an unusual type of ethnic group structure: a situation in which groups are so large in number and so small in size that none has the capacity to dominate other groups at the national level. In this scenario, ethnic conflict can be deadly, but it is usually concentrated at the local, rather than national, level. Institutions which build in incentives for inter-group accommodation are thus of most utility for moderating the behaviour of various groups 'on the ground' — for example, in the course of election campaigning. And, because there are so many ethnic groups, even relatively small single-member electoral districts will be sufficiently heterogeneous to encourage accommodative electoral strategies under integrative systems like AV. As we have seen, such a structure is typified by the Melanesian cases of PNG, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. In all of these cases there are hundreds — or in the PNG case, thousands — of competing ethnic micro-polities due to the extreme linguistic diversity and the tribal or clan-based nature of ethnic identity. While characteristic of Melanesia, this degree of micro-fragmentation appears to be rare in other regions. Even the most ethnically-fragmented regions of sub-Saharan Africa, which many analysts erroneously believe to be the world's most fractionalized tribal states, exhibit considerably lower levels of ethno-linguistic fragmentation than Melanesia.

In the other type of facilitating social structure, featuring a high degree of ethnic group *dispersion*, the sheer number of ethnic groups tells us only half the story. We also need to know something about the *geographic concentration* of those groups. Those countries which have a dispersed and inter-mixed structure of ethnic demography are likely to produce a high degree of electorate-level *heterogeneity*, even when there are only two or three ethnic groups. As Lijphart himself has noted, this type of plural society tends to be based upon "geographical mixture but mutual social avoidance" (1977, 17) — a good description of the basis of ethnic relations in highly inter-mixed but antagonistic 'bi-communal systems' such as Fiji, Malaysia and Guyana.<sup>9</sup> Such mutual social avoidance does, for course, involve some degree of residential segregation — similar communities are likely to live in the same street or suburb. But barring

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<sup>9</sup> See Milne 1988, 101-13.



ethnic gerrymandering, when overlaid by the much larger boundaries of single-member electorates, the result will tend towards *ethnic heterogeneity*.

Such a structure is relatively uncommon in some regions, such as Latin America and much of Africa. But it is a common feature of regions in which large immigrant populations have been imported or immigrated during times of colonial rule, and then stayed and integrated into the society while retaining their own ethnic identity. As the following table shows, it is a particularly common model of ethnic group structure in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>10</sup> The table, adapted from Robert Ted Gurr's *Minorities at Risk*, lists those ethnically-divided countries in the developing world in which at least 10% of the population is classified as minorities, ranked in order of the aggregate proportion of minority groups *which see themselves and act as a politicised community* (and can therefore be expected to vote along ethnic lines). One of the most useful aspects of Gurr's study for our purposes is that it examines not only the size of minority groups, but also their type, ideological coherence and, most importantly, their *level of geographical concentration or dispersion*. When this factor is included, it is possible to identify those states in which groups are widely dispersed across urban and rural areas, compared to those who tend to be concentrated in one or two regions (Gurr 1993, 326). Where most groups are coded as geographically dispersed, many electorates will necessarily be ethnically *heterogeneous*, and should thus present the necessary preconditions for vote-pooling approaches to succeed. Cases in which all or most groups are classified as geographically concentrated, by contrast, will usually feature ethnically *homogenous* electorates and thus limited prospects of vote-pooling as a solution to ethnic conflicts.

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<sup>10</sup> This has been emphasised by another study of ethnic conflict, which found that the Asian region had the highest number of ethnopolitical groups involved in serious conflict in the postwar period of any region in the world. See Gurr 1994, 349-53.

**Table 8.1: Minority Group Proportions and Geographic Concentration**

Country	Main minority groups	Aggregated proportion of minority groups	Index of group concentration
Guinea	Fulani (30%); Malinke (30%); Susu (16%)	0.760	5.6
Niger	Djerema/Songhai (19%); Hausa (46%); Tuareg (11%)	0.760	5.0
Cameroon	Kirdi (22%); Westerners (20%); Bamileke (27%)	0.690	6.0
Ethiopia	Afars (5%); Eritreans (7.5%); Nilo-Saharans (1.6%); Oromo (40%); Somali (5%); Tigreans (9%)	0.670	5.6
Bolivia	Native highland peoples (61%); native lowland peoples (2%)	0.630	6.0
Zambia	Bemba (37%); Lozi (Barotse) (7%); Tonga (19%)	0.630	5.3
Zaire	Bakongo (10.3%); Luba (Kasai Province ) (6.1%); Lingala (20%); Lunda, Yeke (5.6%); Kivu Region (13%)	0.550	5.6
Uganda	Ankole (8%); Baganda (16%); Kakwa (3%); Karamojong (2%); Konjo, Amba (3%); Langi (6%); Lugbara, Madi (4.9%); Nyarwanda (Rwandans) (5.9%)	0.528	6.0
Mauritius*	Creole speakers (36%), Moslems (10%), Chinese (5%)	0.510	2.0 <sup>1</sup>
Malaysia	Chinese (34%); Dayaks (3.95%); East Indians (8.3%); Kadazans (3.9%);	0.502	4.0
Mali	Tuareg (4.7%); Mande (43%)	0.477	6.0
Angola	Bakongo (14%); Ovimbundu (33%)	0.470	6.0
Nigeria	Hausa/Fulani (29%); Ibo (11%)	0.460	5.0
Nauru**	I-Kiribati and Tuvaluans (26%); Chinese (9%), Europeans and Indians (8%)	0.430	1.0 <sup>1</sup>
Peru	Afro-Americans (0.5%); native highland peoples (40%); native lowland peoples (1.2%)	0.417	5.7
Ghana	Ashanti (28%); Ewe (13%); Mossi, Dagomba (16%)	0.410	6.0
Kenya	Kikuyu (21%); Luo (13%); Masai (1.6%); Somali (2%); Turkana, Pokot (3%); Redille, Borana (1%)	0.410	5.7
Sierra Leone	Creoles (1.9%); Limba (8%); Mende (31%)	0.410	4.6
South Africa*	Zulus (15%); Coloureds (8%); Afrikaners (8%); other Whites (6%); Indians (2.4%)	0.394	4.0
Togo	Ewe (22.2%); Kabre (14%)	0.362	5.0
Ecuador	Afro-Americans (8%); native highland peoples (26%); native lowland peoples (1%)	0.350	6.0
Burma	Arakanese Muslims (3.7%); Zomis (Chins) (2.4%); Kachins (1.1%); Karens (10.2%); Mons (2.5%); Shans (7.7%); Hill tribes (2.5%)	0.301	5.3
Brunei**	Chinese (17%); Dusun (8%); Indians (4%)	0.290	3.25 <sup>1</sup>
Singapore*	Malays (15%); Indians (7%); Europeans (2%)	0.240	2.0 <sup>1</sup>
India	Kashmiris (3.4%); Muslims (11.6%); Nagas (0.01%); Santals (0.066%); Scheduled tribes (6.1%); Sikhs (1.88%); Mizos (Lushais)(0.07%); Tripuras (0.07%)	0.208	4.6
Sri Lanka	Indian Tamils (5.5%); Sri Lankan Tamils (12.6%);	0.181	4.0
Thailand	Chinese (10%); Malay Muslims (2.5%); Northern Hill Tribes (1.5%)	0.140	4.0
Bangladesh	Chittagong Hills peoples (0.49%); Hindus (12.2%)	0.127	3.5

Source: Gurr 1993, 326-28.

\* Data from Minority Rights Group International 1997 \*\* Data from Asian-Pacific Cultural Center 1995.

<sup>1</sup> Author's estimate.

At face value, the above table would appear to indicate that the most favourable cases for utilising centripetal methods to encourage inter-group accommodation are mostly located in Africa, as the degree of ethnic heterogeneity is so much higher in Africa than other regions. However, when we take into account the *geographical concentration* of threatened minorities, this situation changes markedly. As Table 8.1 indicates, Gurr's study found that countries in the Asia-Pacific region had the *lowest* degree of ethnic group concentration of any region in the world, while the countries of sub-Saharan Africa had the *highest* degree of concentration. The Asia-Pacific region is defined as those countries coded by Gurr as 'Asian', with the addition of the three nations of the region coded as 'Western': Australia, New Zealand and Japan. On Gurr's scale of group concentration from 1 ("widely dispersed in most urban and rural areas") to 6 ("concentrated mainly in one or several adjoining regions"), the average ethnic group concentration is 4.00 for the Asia-Pacific, compared to 4.25 for Western Europe, 4.58 for North Africa and the Middle East, 4.78 for Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, 5.06 for the Americas and 5.09 for Africa South of the Sahara (1993, 326-28). Significantly, in most Asia-Pacific countries the largest minority groups were all coded at the highest level of group dispersion: Hindus in Bangladesh, Muslims in India, Chinese and Indians in Malaysia, and Malays and Indians in Singapore all fell into this category. Much of the reason for the Asia-Pacific's degree of group dispersion is due to the presence of the vast Indian and Chinese diasporas within the region. Many of these groups were imported as foreign guestworkers under British colonial rule last century, or arrived under the guise of economically-motivated migration earlier this century. The final section of this thesis will thus examine, on a state-by-state basis, the reasons for the highly-intermixed settlement patterns in much of the Asia-Pacific, and the applicability of centripetalism as a strategy for managing ethnic tensions in the divided states of the region.

### *Malaysia*

We have already examined the ethnic division in Fiji, where indentured Indian labourers were imported in large numbers to grow sugar cane. A broadly similar situation exists in Malaysia, in which the Chinese (34 percent of population) and East Indian (8.3 percent) minorities were originally imported (or encouraged to migrate) for specific labour-market purposes: the Chinese primarily to work in tin mines and the Indians to

work on colonial rubber plantations. Both immigrant groups succeeded to such an extent that the three major groups of Malaysian society — Malays, Chinese and Indian — became intermixed and dispersed around much of peninsula Malaysia. The result was that the single-member electoral districts drawn for Malaysia's first council elections in 1952-53 were *ethnically heterogeneous*. The Alliance party formed to contest these elections responded to this electoral reality by endorsing an ethnic mixture of candidates — Malays in predominantly Malay seats, Chinese in Chinese seats and so on — so that it effectively operated as a multiethnic coalition.<sup>11</sup> To succeed in heterogeneous districts, however, the component parties of the Alliance had to be able to convince at least some of their supporters to vote for candidates from other ethnic groups in some seats, and to gain this cross-ethnic support, those candidates had to campaign and behave moderately on ethnic issues.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the main opposition parties, which were mostly seen as being representative of Chinese interests, had to attract at least some support from Malays (Brown 1994, 235). A number of studies have emphasised the key importance of these heterogeneous districts in promoting the ongoing success of Malaysia's broad, catch-all UMNO coalition, which runs an ethnically-mixed slate of candidates across the country.<sup>13</sup> But Malaysia's first-past-the-post electoral system does not enable the expression of second preference support, implying that vote-pooling arrangements are institutionalised more by historical circumstance and the nature of the coalition than by the electoral law itself. As successive boundary delimitations have increasingly reduced the heterogeneity of most seats in favour of Malay majorities, so the inter-ethnic nature of the ruling coalition has declined, along with Malaysia's claims to be a competitive democracy.<sup>14</sup>

### *Singapore and Brunei*

Like Malaysia, the city-state of Singapore exhibits a three-way ethnic split between a Chinese, Malay and Indian population, although here the Chinese are a clear majority, a fact which strongly influenced Singapore's withdrawal from the Malay Federation to form a separate state in 1965. Singapore today is home to significant Malay (15 percent) and Indian (9 percent) minorities, both of which are, to a considerable extent,

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<sup>11</sup> See Horowitz 1991b, 466.

<sup>12</sup> See von Vorys 1975, 302-5.

<sup>13</sup> See Hannum 1996, 464-71.

<sup>14</sup> See Rachagan 1993, 49-86.

interspersed with the majority Chinese population. The multi-ethnic composition of Singapore's population, its geographic position between two much larger Malay countries (Malaysia and Indonesia) and its authoritarian and technocratic approach to governance in the context of rule by one dominant party (the People's Action Party) has encouraged Singapore's leaders to find ways of balancing its multi-ethnic status with their oft-stated desire to build a inclusive 'meritocracy'.

One way of achieving this end has been via engineering of the electoral system. Singapore's electoral system provides for a combination of single and multi-member constituencies, and requires parties to run multi-ethnic slates of candidates in the multi-member 'group representation constituencies' in order to facilitate minority representation in parliament.<sup>15</sup> Since 1991, of each four-person team competing to win a group representation constituency, one must be a member of a minority group (i.e. a Malay, Indian or Eurasian). The result of this move is that Singapore's main ethnic groups are now represented in parliament in close proportion to their overall numbers in the community. While the nature of the electoral process in Singapore is decidedly authoritarian, it does thus enable the representation of minority ethnic interests. Furthermore, the use of mandated ethnic slates means that members of one group will always be voting for members of another, so competition between groups will have to take place on the basis of factors other than ethnicity. In addition, the advent of government policies of multiculturalism and meritocracy, and public housing policies which encourage an even ethnic distribution of the population, have resulted in a significant depoliticization of ethnicity (Ganesan 1996, 74). Singapore thus appears to represent a largely successful attempt, within the confines of a system of benign authoritarianism, at reducing the political importance of ethnicity through a combination of constitutional design and public policy.

Other states in the region have similar social structures to Singapore but not the successful history of de-emphasising ethnicity. Brunei, for example, which has not had any direct elections since 1965, has relatively coherent and geographically interspersed minority populations of Chinese (17 percent) and Indians (4 percent), as well as indigenous Dusun tribespeople (8 percent) which are inter-mixed with its Malay majority population. Unlike Singapore, however, public policies in Brunei deliberately

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<sup>15</sup> See Brown 1994, 102.

discriminate in favour of the majority Malay community, and against the economically-powerful Chinese population (Asian-Pacific Cultural Center 1995, 14). Brunei's small size and the concentration of its population in the major city, Banda Serei Bagawan, ensures that most groups (with the exception of indigenous tribespeople) are highly intermixed with each other. Were Brunei to make a transition to democracy at some time in the future — an unlikely prospect at the time writing, it must be said — then electoral mechanisms to manage ethnic tensions and secure minority representation, such as those used in Singapore, would be an important element of building a sustainable system.

### *Burma*

Ethnicity has had a powerful impact upon the fractured course of democracy in Burma (Myanmar). Despite successive attempts to impose authoritarian mono-ethnic rule, Burma remains a country of extraordinary ethnic diversity, with over one hundred indigenous languages spoken by ethnic minorities, and with a long and ongoing history of minority ethnic insurgencies against the majority Burman population. Burma's more significant ethnic minorities include the Karen in southern and eastern Burma, the Shan in the east, and the Chin, Kachin, Mon and Arakanese in the north and north-east. However, many of these groups — such as the Mons, Karens and Arakanese — also live intermingled with Burmans in the Burma delta and coastal regions (Silverstein 1997a, 153fn). Like many other Asia-Pacific states, colonial rule had a powerful impact upon the construction of ethnic identity in Burma. May argues that the British partition of the country into Frontier Areas and Ministerial Burma had a profound effect upon future ethnic insurgencies and separatism amongst the Shan and Karen peoples, creating and reinforcing a sense of difference between these groups and the Burman majority. Successive efforts on the part of military-backed regimes to centralise political power and create a unitary state have resulted in repeated ethnic insurgencies and separatist movements (May 1990, 44-47).

In keeping with the situation in other parts of the Asia-Pacific, ethnic tensions in Burma appear to be as much the result of proximity and intermixture as of regional concentration. Although many of Burma's dozen or so indigenous ethnic minorities are regionally based, particularly in the frontier areas, there are nonetheless significantly mixed populations of Karens, Arakanese Muslims, Chinese, Indian Hindus and various

hill tribes widely interspersed with the Burman majority in lowlands Burma. In fact, the scattered distribution of some of the major ethnic minorities has had a significant impact upon their capacity for self-determination. At independence, indigenous minorities who lived intermingled with the Burmans included the Mon, Arakanese and other smaller groups (Silverstein 1997b, 178). The Shans were “spread across Burma’s political map in a manner which ultimately disempowered [them] from taking an active part in broader national affairs” (Smith 1997, 101). The demographic spread of the Karen people, the largest of Burma’s minorities making up approximately 10 percent of the total population, meant that they did not have sufficient regional concentration to form a separate state under colonial rule and were ultimately divided across five different political units. Similarly, the Kachin state was actually a mixture of Kachin and Burman ethnic groups. Rangoon itself was a highly cosmopolitan city under colonial rule, “with Indian, Chinese, Anglo-Burmese, Karen and other ethnic communities predominating over the ethnic Burman minority” (Smith 1997, 105). In short, the ethnic landscape was a complex intermixture of peoples and languages – unsurprisingly, considering that the main ethnic Burman migration to ‘Burma proper’ (i.e. the lowlands delta) only occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century under British colonial rule (Smith 1997, 105).

The constitutional reaction at independence in 1948 to this complex ethnic structure was a combination of ethnically-based states, reserved parliamentary seats for various groups, and ethnic ‘councils’ comprising the members of parliament from that group to look after the special interests of intermixed or dispersed minorities. In the constitutional discussions which preceded independence, considerable attention was given to the autonomy demands of the various ethnic groups. The independence Constitution provided for a federal Union of Burma, with three ethnic states (the Shan, Kayah and Kachin) and one ethnic ‘special division’ (the Chin) comprising part of the Union; in 1951 the Karens also gained their own state. The Shan and Kayah groups were also given a constitutional right of secession after ten years, although this option was subsequently denied to them (Maung 1959, 169-94). Provision was also made in the 1947 constitution for a bi-cameral legislature, with an upper house (the Chamber of Nationalities) elected on communal terms, and the lower house (the Chamber of Deputies) elected on a population basis. In the Chamber of Nationalities, the Shan, Kachin, Chin, Karen and Kayah peoples collectively commanded a majority over the

Burman representatives, with 72 out of 125 seats.<sup>16</sup> This reflected the communal basis of representation in Burma's 1937 Constitution, in which 40 of the House of Representative's 132 seats were reserved for Karens, Indians, Chinese, Anglo-Indians and Europeans — a system which, as in Fiji, probably aggravated rather than reduced ethnic tension (Furnivall 1948, 169). Burma's 1947 constitution survived for 14 turbulent years of democracy between 1948 and 1962, before democracy was overthrown in a military coup which also had strong ethnic motivations.<sup>17</sup>

The inability of the political system to defuse the salience of ethnicity in these early years and promote inter-ethnic co-operation was central to the failure of democracy in Burma. It has also served to stymie democracy's re-emergence: when a 1988 popular uprising against the Burmese government took place, ethnic cleavages between Burman and non-Burman remained so pronounced that the type of inter-ethnic cooperation necessary to bring down the military-backed government simply did not occur (May 1990, 55). Violent ethnic conflict is now so entrenched in Burma's history that if and when democracy is restored, the electoral system will *have* to encourage ethnic accommodation and cross-ethnic political loyalties if democracy is to survive. Given this, centripetalism is probably the only realistic electoral strategy for a return to democracy in Burma. It is worth noting that three key socio-structural conditions for the success of centripetal electoral methods are all present in Burma. First, there is a *multiplicity* of ethnic groups: Smith claims that "over one hundred different languages or ethnic sub-groups are still clearly recognisable today" (1997, 104). Second, as discussed above, there is a considerable *geographic dispersion* and *intermixture* of a number of the larger ethnic minorities (which together make up approximately 30 percent of the Burmese population) with the Burman majority, plus an estimated 1.5 million ethnic Indian and Chinese inhabitants. Third, ethnic identities in Burma appear to be relatively dynamic and fluid. Smith sums up the situation by noting that despite its

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<sup>16</sup> The Second Schedule to the 1948 Constitution of the Union of Burma provided that, of the 125 seats in the Chamber of Nationalities, 25 were reserved for representatives from the Shan State, 12 from Kachin, eight from the Special Division of the Chins, three from the Karenni State, 24 for representatives of Karens, and 53 seats for the Burman remainder. A constitutional amendment in 1951 changed these proportions to 15 representatives from the Karen State and 62 representatives from the remaining Burmese territories.

<sup>17</sup> See May 1990, 44–45.



extraordinary ethnic diversity and depth ... few areas of Burma can be described as ethnically exclusive. In Burma's complex ethnic mosaic, many parts of the country have gone through periods of considerable social flux. In such an ever-changing political environment, regional loyalties have often superseded ethnic loyalties, and a complex process of change and assimilation has constantly been taking place (Smith 1997, 103).

These conditions suggest that the potential for creative constitutional engineering to enhance prospects for democracy in Burma are surprisingly high. Considerably less high, however, are the prospects for democratic transition in Burma in the foreseeable future, given the entrenched military rule since the 1990 election of the National League for Democracy was overturned and replaced by an authoritarian one-party regime. Nonetheless, constitutional options for a return to representative democracy have focussed on the need to include all minority groups as equal partners in a revived federal system as the first step in building an enduring democracy in Burma.

### *Micronesia*

The size of a state in both geographic and population terms has long been considered to have an impact upon its prospects for sustainable democracy, although experts have disagreed as to whether size ultimately helps or hinders democratic prospects (Dahl and Tufte 1972). Most studies have argued that a relatively small population size should increase the chances for sustainable democracy due to the increased manageability and greater inter-elite contact facilitated by smallness (Lijphart 1977, 65-70; Powell 1982, 31-34). The high levels of democracy in the small island states of the Pacific and Caribbean provide some empirical support for this proposition. For our purposes, however, the question of small size is also directly related to questions of ethnic demography. In very small states, it is almost inevitable that members of different ethnic groups will be geographically interspersed with each other.

The region of the world with the highest proportion by far of such 'microstates' is the Pacific in general, and Micronesia in particular. Unlike the relatively homogenous indigenous populations found in much of Polynesia, or the extremely fragmented pattern of ethno-linguistic groups in Melanesia, the Micronesian region also provides several examples of the type of intermixture of three or four ethnic communities found in much of south-east Asia. A scattered arc of islands stretching across the central Pacific, many of Micronesia's island populations exhibit both highly intermixed patterns of ethnic settlement and some degree of inter-ethnic tension, and thus appear to

offer suitable facilitating conditions for centripetal techniques to facilitate the management of inter-ethnic conflict. However, the extremely small size of most Micronesian states in both geographic and populations terms (generally less than 100,000 people and sometimes less than 10,000) means their comparative value is relatively limited.

As elsewhere, the influence of colonialism and labour migration has impacted upon ethnic structure. The major influence upon ethnic demographics, however, is simply the sheer smallness of scale, which makes local-level heterogeneity almost inevitable. In Guam, for example, issues of ethnicity, indigenous rights and immigration have fuelled ethnic tensions (Larmour 1994, 50). Similar issues have arisen in the Federated States of Micronesia (Levine 1997). It is the tiny former Australian colony of Nauru, however, that provides the best example of the application of centripetalism to small states. There, the majority Nauruan population are intermixed with other Pacific Islanders of mostly Kiribatian and Tuvaluan origins (26%), Chinese (8%), and Europeans and Indians (8%), most of whom came to Nauru to work in the phosphate industry or associated services. Recent economic difficulties have seen increasing tensions between these groups and Nauruans. As noted earlier, Nauru provides an example of centripetal electoral institutions through a multi-member version of the alternative vote, which was adopted at independence in 1968 as a modified version of the system used in Australia, which had administered Nauru as a United Nations Trust Territory since 1947. With only 9,400 people, no political parties and little in the way of political campaigns, it is difficult to generalise about the impact of ethnicity on politics in Nauru, although the limited evidence available suggests that identity factors such as family links and religion are major influences upon voter choice (Crocombe 1988, 41-61). Preference-swapping strategies are thus virtually inevitable due to the combination of divided and intermixed ethnic groups with centripetal electoral institutions.

#### *Other ethnically-divided states in the Asia-Pacific*

Other dispersed but less politically cohesive minorities in the Asia-Pacific region include the Muslim population in India (11.6 percent), the Hindu (Indian) population in Bangladesh (12 percent), the Chinese (10 percent) in Thailand, Maori (12 percent) and Pacific Islanders (5 percent) in New Zealand, and Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (2 percent) in Australia. In all cases, however, despite their geographic

dispersion, there is a significant regional bias in the distribution of these groups: Muslims are found predominantly in several states in northern India; Bangladesh's Hindu population is concentrated in Dhaka and the Indian border regions; the Chinese population in Thailand is concentrated in urban areas, particularly Bangkok; Maori and Pacific Islanders predominate on New Zealand's North Island in general and Auckland in particular; and aboriginal Australians, while small in overall numbers, make up significant proportions of the population of many remote areas, particularly in the Northern Territory, north Queensland and the Torres Strait. In most of these cases, the relatively small size of these groups combined with their regional spread and lack of political organisation has made it difficult for them to gain meaningful representation in the political system via the electoral process.

In contrast to these intermixed patterns of ethnic group demography, there are also large but regionally-concentrated ethnic populations in other parts of the Asia-Pacific such as Indonesia (Arakanese, East Timorese, Papuans, Dayaks etc), the Philippines (Cordillera peoples, Moros), Pakistan (Bengalis, Punjabis, Sindhis), Laos (various hill tribes) and elsewhere. While such regionally-concentrated ethnic groups essentially rule out preference-swapping as a useful device for legislative elections, they would not have the same consequence for elections of a national president. One of the clearest examples of regionally-concentrated ethnic group distribution in the Asia-Pacific region is the case of Sri Lanka, which adopted a variant of AV to elect its president in 1978. Sri Lanka's Tamil minority (12 percent) are geographically concentrated in the north-east of the country, but this has not ruled out the use of centripetal approaches to encourage inter-ethnic accommodation for Sri Lankan presidential elections. As discussed earlier, the Sri Lankan presidential electoral system utilises a preferential formula which takes voters' second and third preferences into account if no candidate gains an absolute majority of first preferences. Because presidential elections effectively treat the whole island as one constituency, a heterogeneous single-member electoral district is effectively created. While the three presidential elections to date have all been won by absolute majorities, the possibility that preferences may one day determine the outcome of a presidential election has given the major Sinhalese parties in Sri Lanka an incentive to moderate their policy positions and to take account of minority ethnic and religious groups when campaigning — incentives conspicuously lacking under other systems, such as first-past-the-post. This example underlines the potential of preferential voting

and presidentialism to encourage inter-ethnic accommodation even where groups are predominantly concentrated in one geographic region.

One of the interesting aspects of electoral system design in the Asia-Pacific is the way that the most ethnically-divided democracies of the region – India, PNG, Malaysia – have chosen FPTP electoral laws, which usually under-represent minority groups, but have attempted other ways of accommodating ethnic diversity (such as via constitutional recognition of traditional customs in PNG, multi-ethnic coalitions of parties in Malaysia, reserved seats for ‘scheduled’ castes and tribes in India, and forms of devolution or federalism in all three countries). By contrast, forms of proportional representation have usually been adopted in more ethnically-homogenous states such as Taiwan, Japan, South Korea and Cambodia. This represents a reversal of the choice of electoral systems in Europe, where

the earliest moves towards proportional representation came in the ethnically most heterogeneous countries ... In linguistically and religiously divided societies majority elections could clearly threaten the continued existence of the political system. The introduction of some element of minority representation came to be seen as an essential step in a strategy of territorial consolidation (Rokkan 1970, 157).

As we have seen, the need for recognition of minorities through the electoral system in the Asia-Pacific has generally been achieved through methods other than proportional representation. These have tended to explore ways to combine majoritarian electoral methods with devices which ameliorate the potentially damaging effects of such systems upon minorities. Such devices include the use of group representation constituencies in Singapore; preferential voting in Sri Lanka; provincial electorates in PNG; communal electoral rolls in Fiji; and reserved seats for minorities in India, Indonesia and so on. From 1867 to 1993, New Zealand was also an example of this tendency, combining FPTP electoral methods with four seats reserved exclusively for Maori representatives. In 1994 however, New Zealand became a prominent exception to this general trend when it abandoned majority electoral methods and moved to a Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) system of proportional representation.

### New Zealand

New Zealand's adoption of MMP in 1994 appears to be one of the few conscious choices of proportional representation in the region which was motivated, at least in part, by a desire to better represent minority populations. As predicted by its advocates,

the change from FPTP to MMP had an immediate positive impact upon the representation of ethnic minorities in the New Zealand parliament. At the first MMP elections in 1996, one Asian, three Pacific Islanders and 13 Maori won parliamentary seats, thus ensuring for the first time their representation in the parliament in rough proportion to their numbers in the general community. Moreover, a Maori political party, New Zealand First, found itself in a crucial balance-of-power position after the elections, and after protracted negotiations formed a governing alliance with the conservative National Party. MMP in New Zealand thus provided the means for minority groups in general, and Maori in particular, to have a much greater impact on the political process than had been the case previously.<sup>18</sup>

### Cambodia

The Asia-Pacific region also provides one of the most graphic examples of the folly of relying purely on proportional mechanisms for democracy in divided societies without any concomitant mechanisms for encouraging inter-group accommodation, in the shape of the transitional constitutional arrangements for the restoration of democracy in Cambodia in 1993. The deep divisions in Cambodian politics are not ethnic but ideological, with electoral support being split between the former Communist government, in the shape of the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), and the Royalist FUNCINPEC party. There is also, however, a significant ethnic factor overlaying Cambodian politics due to the historical influence of Vietnam, with the CPP being seen as more pro-Vietnamese and FUNCINPEC as more nationalist Cambodian. The Khmer Rouge, who did not participate in the 1993 election, were violently anti-Vietnamese in their rhetoric and actions — and hence gave some tacit support to FUNCINPEC for this reason.

After two decades of war, Cambodia was therefore unquestionably a divided society at the time of the UN-sponsored peace process which culminated in national elections in 1993. The institutional arrangements for these elections and their aftermath were, on paper at least, highly consociational. A highest-remainder list PR system was used for the elections, which produced proportional results in which the two largest parties — FUNCINPEC and the CPP — each gained just under half of all seats in the 120-seat National Assembly (a third party, the Buddhist Liberal Democratic League (BLDP),

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<sup>18</sup> See Sharp 1997, 439-40.

won ten seats, with one seat going to the very small MOULINAKA party). After the election, a 'grand coalition' power-sharing deal was negotiated between the major parties, with the leaders of FUNCINPEC and the CPP, Prince Rannaridh and Hun Sen, being installed as 'first' and 'second' prime ministers, respectively. Ministerial positions were "farmed out evenly between FUNCINPEC and the CPP. Four were granted to the BLDP, and ... MOULINAKA was also given a post. All parties were thus included in the government" (Rowley 1996, 30). There was even a minority veto enshrined in the new constitution, courtesy of a two-thirds majority requirement for constitutional amendment and for no-confidence votes, and an element of group autonomy due to the combination of provincial governments and the regionalized patterns of the major parties' support bases. The basic provisions of a fully consociationalist package were thus in place by the end of 1993.

The problem with these arrangements was that they provided the structure for a classic 'coalition of convenience' between the two major parties in government, but very little in the way of incentives for accommodation *between* those parties. As no mutual obligations were built into Cambodia's political institutions, the two parties had little to gain by compromising or working together. By late 1997, the coalition arrangement between the CPP and FUNCINPEC was effectively dead, with military units loyal to both sides on the point of armed conflict, terrorist attacks on party supporters, and government virtually paralysed ('Cambodia: death of hopes', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 April 1997). This stand-off was 'resolved' by an intra-government coup, with forces loyal to the 'second' prime minister, Hun Sen, vanquishing allies of the 'first' prime minister, Rannaridh, who fled across the border into Thailand. The divided nature and zero-sum history of politics in Cambodia meant that the coalition arrangements between the two sides were weak and without substance. Moreover, the list PR electoral rules used for the 1993 election meant that there was little relationship between elected MPs and their constituencies, thus undermining the institutionalisation of democratic institutions and encouraging a call for a return to a single-member district system for the next elections due in 1998.<sup>19</sup> In sum, none of the traditional consociational prescriptions of grand coalition executives, proportional representation and minority vetoes appear to have helped the institutionalisation of democracy in Cambodia. While

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<sup>19</sup> See Centre for Comparative Constitutional Studies 1996, 6.

it is by no means clear that alternative arrangements would have produced a better result, the Cambodian case does emphasise the necessity of building, at the very least, some form of mutual dependence and reciprocal support mechanisms into electoral rules if coalition arrangements are to succeed in deeply-divided countries.

## **Conclusion**

Centripetalism has not received the prominence it deserves as an alternative model of democracy and inter-ethnic accommodation in divided societies. Partly this is because of the relative obscurity of the best empirical case for the model, Papua New Guinea; partly it is due to a misunderstanding, even by some of the major scholars in the field, of the importance of political geography in ethnically-divided societies. For example, Donald Horowitz, who pioneered the academic description of the centripetal model of ethnic conflict management, chose South Africa as the major case study to demonstrate the utility of the model. However, the ethnic demography of sub-Saharan Africa in general and South Africa in particular is likely to be unfavourable to the application of centripetal techniques, due to the geographic concentration of ethnic groups and, in South Africa, the demographic legacy of apartheid which deliberately segregated groups of different races (Mattes 1994, 6). For his part, Arend Lijphart has recently argued that “in ethnically divided societies, groups tend to be territorially concentrated, and single-member districts are therefore likely to be ethnically homogenous” (1997, 13). While this statement is probably true for much of Latin America and Africa, it is untrue as a general proposition, and particularly untrue for the Asia-Pacific region. A more accurate description of the nature of plural societies in this region was given by Furnivall back in the 1940s, who defined a plural society as one in which different sections of the same community live side by side but separately within the same political unit so that “they mix but do not combine” (1948, 304).

In summary, outside of the rare cases of extremely highly-fragmented states, such as those found in island Melanesia, the centripetal approach is likely to work best in cases where ethnic or communal groups are geographically intermixed amongst a population, and where conflicts are of a relatively low intensity. This is a fairly common scenario in the Asia-Pacific region due, in large part, to the impacts of colonialism (such as the presence of Chinese and Indian diasporas) and the ‘plural society’ model of antagonistic

but not necessarily deeply hostile inter-group relations. The apparent structural suitability of the Asia-Pacific region for centripetal approaches to the management of ethnic conflict is emphasised by the fact that all the examples of centripetalism cited in this thesis — Australia, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Sri Lanka and Nauru — are located in the Asia-Pacific. Other identifiable cases of the appropriate facilitating conditions for centripetalism, such as the highly-fragmented ethnic structure found in most of Melanesia (such as in PNG, the Solomons, Vanuatu and New Caledonia) or the intermixed ethnic settlement patterns common in south-east Asia (such as in Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and Burma) are also Asia-Pacific countries (see Map Four). Moreover, cases cited by other scholars as being examples of centripetal politics *without* centripetal institutions — such as Malaysia<sup>20</sup>, the Indian state of Kerala<sup>21</sup> and the U.S. state of Hawai'i<sup>22</sup> — are also all located in the Asia-Pacific. This regional concentration of cases provides additional support for the argument that the socio-structural conditions present in much of the Asia-Pacific are likely to be conducive to centripetal approaches to the management of ethnic conflict.

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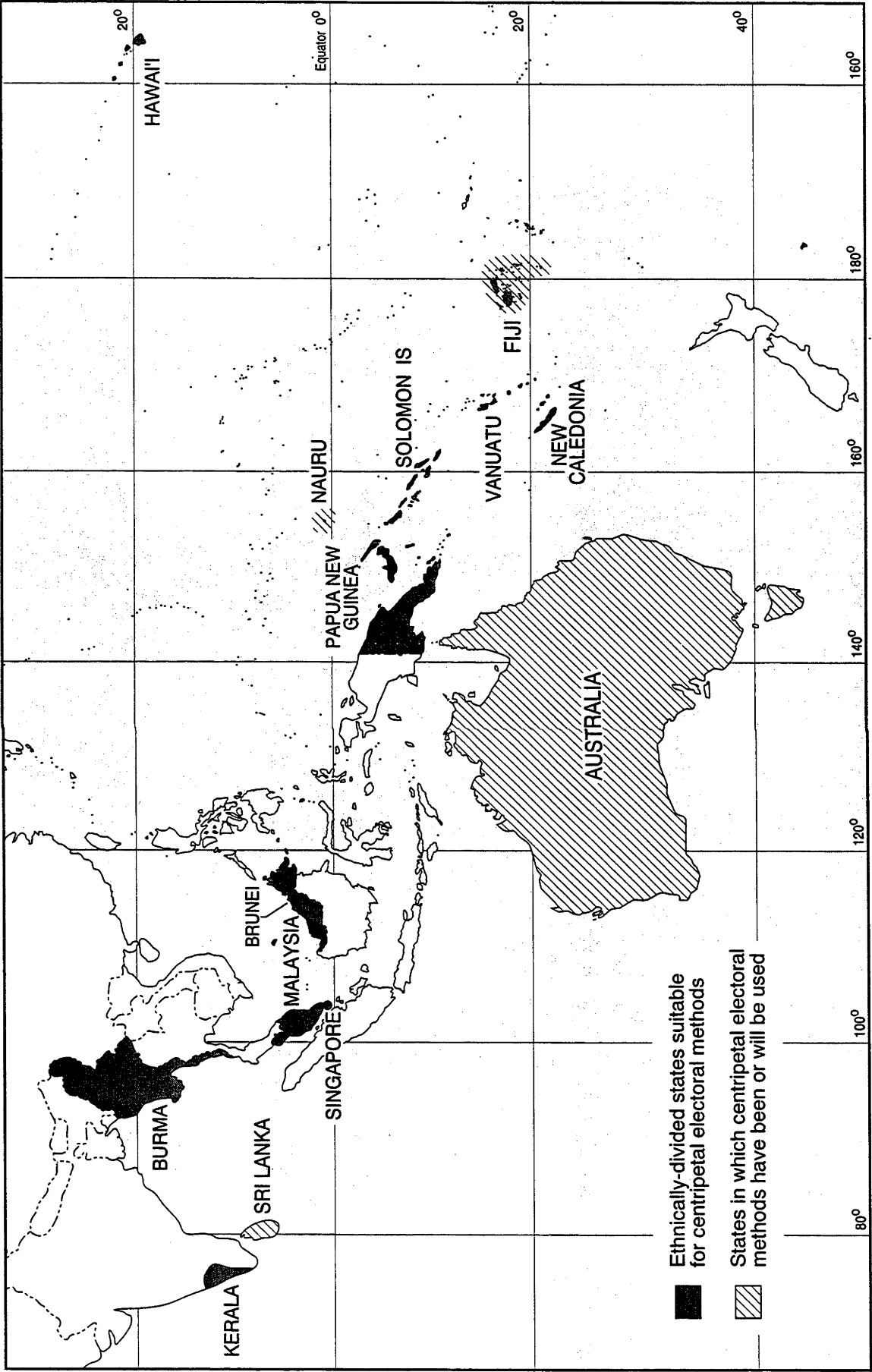
<sup>20</sup> See von Vorys 1975, 302-5.

<sup>21</sup> See Horowitz 1994, 50-51; Chiriyankandath 1997, 16-39.

<sup>22</sup> See Haas 1996, 169-90.



Map Four: Centripetalism in the Asia-Pacific region



This is not to suggest that centripetalism is exclusively an Asia-Pacific model of conflict management. Indeed, as a strategy for ethnic conflict management it may well be applicable to ethnically-divided states in a range of other regions as well, depending on the depth of hostilities and the nature of group demography. Cases in which members of various ethnic groups are geographically interspersed and intermixed, and where ethnic tensions appear to be the result of such intermixture, are present in many regions of the world: for example, the Caribbean (Guyana, Suriname, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago), the Baltics (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the former Yugoslavia (where 'ethnic cleansing' has, however, dramatically increased ethnic homogeneity in many regions), the Middle East (Lebanon, Israel), Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan) and Africa (Mauritius), to name a few.<sup>23</sup> All of these states are genuinely multi-ethnic, and all feature a high degree of ethnic intermixing and, to varying degrees, ethnic tension. Depending upon the level of geographical dispersion of ethnic groups, the centripetal approach may well be the most fruitful method of encouraging co-operative, multi-ethnic politics in cases such as these. It is worth noting that in virtually all of these countries, the nature of the multi-ethnic society is a result of immigration (e.g. Russians in the Baltic) or colonial labour importation (e.g. Africans in the Caribbean) — which suggests that centripetal solutions may be particularly appropriate for the multi-ethnic socio-structural conditions found in many post-colonial polities.

But beyond such cases, the centripetal model of inter-ethnic accommodation is also likely to attract attention in many regions in the future due to the increasingly inter-mixed nature of ethnic group distribution. According to the United Nations, over three fifths of the world's population will be urban by 2030.<sup>24</sup> This worldwide trend of rural-urban migration towards large, multi-ethnic 'world cities' appears to be leading inexorably towards the development of massive, ethnically-heterogeneous urban metropolises as models of human settlement in the 21st century. As these patterns of inter-mixed urban settlement become increasingly common, so the nature of ethnic conflict will necessarily change: tensions will be based on proximity rather than distance, and identities will likely become more fluid as other cleavages are added to ascriptive ones. But this does not imply that the salience of ethnic identity will necessarily break down itself. As ethnic groups increasingly find themselves in close

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<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, none of these countries were included in Gurr's study.

<sup>24</sup> See United Nations 1997.

physical proximity but separated by growing distinctions between rich and poor, and as both education levels and voter sophistication continue to rise, so the centripetal model of inter-ethnic accommodation is likely to become an increasingly attractive option for constitutional engineers worldwide.

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